Realms of Fantasy

PLUS:
17 Fantasy Books & Games Reviewed

Curtis 02271

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December 2000

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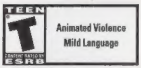

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wielder of battle AXE
SHIVER as sword and manifoster
of MAGIC.
It has been want of spirit
and DECADENCE raging
since I last FIRED THE WELL
THE VIKING lands have been
ripped open like a SCAB!!
THE MARROW FLOWING
DARK SHADOWS EMANATING
from the Nether WORLD
by the
BESTIAL SARK AMEN

WHEN FIRST I BORE ON AND SAW
the pillage AND looting
by those bound in EVIL,
I, RAGNAR the MIGHTY,
hit my KNEES IN
the MOST VIOLENT of retches
after surveying the SIGHTS of
three-day spoil left
LYING stretched AND MAIMED
in the FIELD of BATTLE.

AS I EMERGED,
UNHURT AND UNSCATHED
FROM the UNDERWORLD
I FOUND, IT WAS HE,
CONRACK the CONQUEROR,
WHO SCAPEGOATED
the BLAME AND BANE, OF SARK AMEN'S
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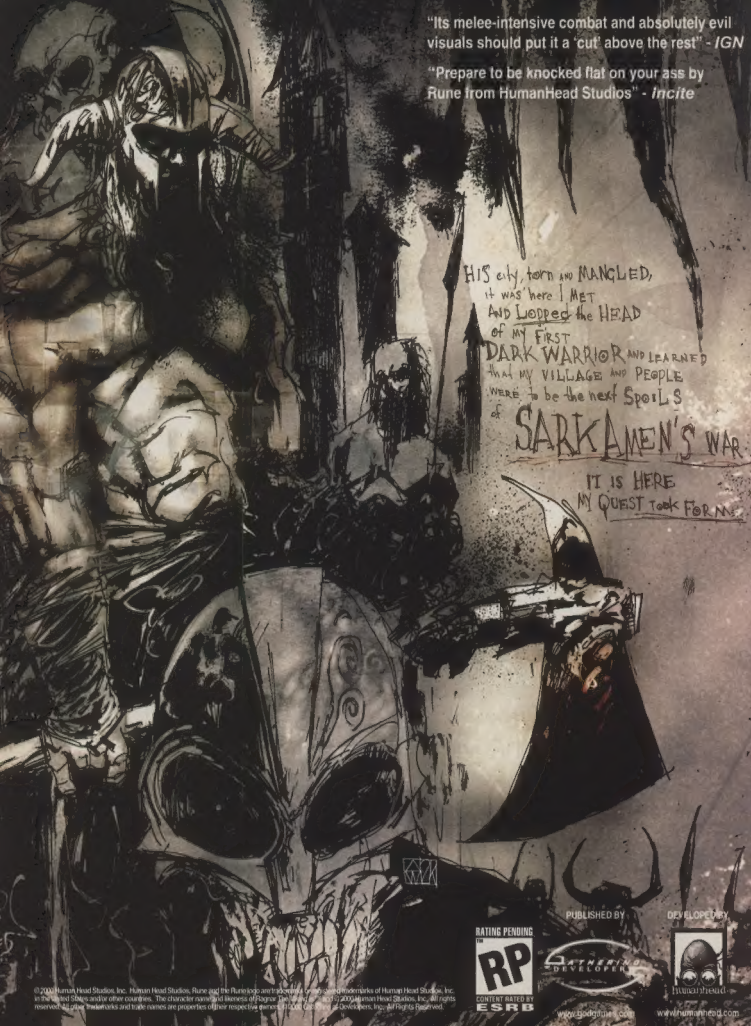
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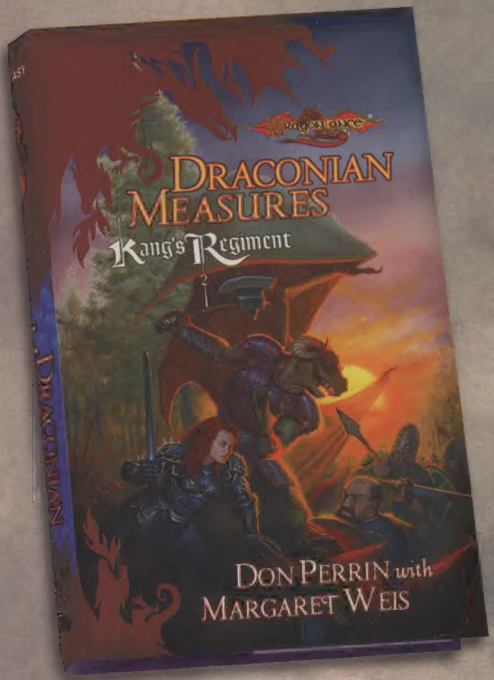

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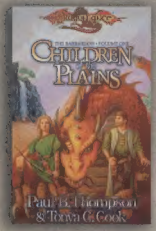

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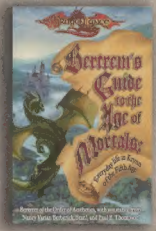

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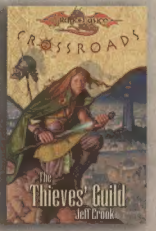

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ABOVE: Our Gallery takes a look into the digital world of Rick Berry.
COVER: Michael Whelan's Elric *is victorious in his battle against the demon.*

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And now for a cosmo moment: Our Guest Editorial continues.

Before I introduce this issue's Guest Editorial, I'd like to take this opportunity to say: "All men, turn the page immediately. Do not read this. Important secrets of the sisterhood are about to be revealed, and not only do you not want to know them, if you do discover them, they won't work anymore. So go away."

The Life of a Gamer's Wife

By Christine Anne Z. Russell

"Hey, man, hurry and finish your character. We need someone for cannon fodder."

"Very funny. Just 'cause your decker couldn't do his job and my street samurai died for no good reason."

"Hey, even I had to roll a hand of god to keep those paranormal animals from killing me. So what's your new archetype, anyway?"

"Corporate mage."

"Any cyberwear?"

"Yeah."

"Gee, Hon, those cookies smell great ..."

A typical Saturday night in the life of a gamer's wife.

Who is this man speaking in an unintelligible tongue whom I hath promised to love and cherish until his dice are forever silenced? One of the guys most of us looked down our noses at during all those junior high and high school years. They lined the walls of the rec room dances, shyly looking at their two left feet. They sat in the computer lab or in the library while reading *Choose Your Own Adventure* or *Dragonlance* books. They didn't play many sports, their mode of transportation required a lock and chain, and their clothes never had the "right" labels on them. They were ... the gamer geeks.

And, as my luck would have it, they were the nice guys. You know, the ones who said what they meant, who weren't afraid of commitment, who were as real as it gets. I say "my luck" because I smooched a long line of toads before I found my prince. I was one of the "popular" girls, one of the choir and drama club people. I rode the game bus and did the routines for the pep rallies. I dated the "cool" guys: the quarterbacks and the wrestlers (they've got some pretty interesting moves). I had to make sure my men fit what I thought a man was supposed to be. My models for comparison were from GQ so y'know, that was real fair. But hey, I was 16.

Ladies, let me tell you what you're missing out on!

Have you found it difficult to initiate an invigorating conversation with your boyfriend after you've been dating for longer than three months? Date a gamer! All you have to do is learn the lingo. This requires learning a bit about his games, but soon you'll be talking like a pro. And once you get him started he'll talk for hours. And hours. Ahem. At least you don't sit there saying things like, "We never communicate" to no avail. (And you can make off-color remarks about his Rod of Lordly Might.)

Finding a shortage of recreational activities to share with your honey? Gamers are gamers through and through. They'll play games that may seem weird to you: the ones that come with dice of every imaginable shape and size and mountains of books filled with a rule to end every argument from an accurate range of flight for certain types of arrows to whether or not casting reincarnation on an undead creature kills it. Eventually, though, it grows on you and soon you find yourself playing along.

Can't get your guy to stay at home? Worried about what influences his friends are? Tell him to game at your house. You'll know exactly where he is and will get to know his friends. When they actually want to go somewhere, you'll know who you want him to be around and who you don't. And there's nothing like the appreciation you get when you walk in a room with fresh baked banana bread or a plate of gooey chocolate chip cookies from a bunch of guys who haven't had anything to eat in nine hours and are picking cold cheese bits out of a stale pizza box.

Some women see my being married to a gamer as strange, but I find it no stranger than women who've married sports fanatics. Instead of him parking his and all his friends' butts on my clean furniture while gulping beer, yelling and tossing Cheetos in the air every time some guy with a ball does something they like or hate, they're rolling dice, chatting stats, and killing imaginary creatures. (OK, sometimes someone still tosses a Cheeto or two.) Instead of staying out all hours in smoke-filled bars where alcohol, women, and marriage don't seem to mix, he's sitting with a bunch of guys in an environment that in no way makes me want to sniff his collar suspiciously when he returns home. And when he starts talking in some strange language that only those of this secret society understand, I know the Special Ops involving the use of a battle map will take place on my coffee table. Yes, the life of a gamer's wife. I never would have imagined.

Excuse me, my cookies are done. I must go and be worshiped. ♦

REALMS OF FANTASY

VOLUME 7 NUMBER 2

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Dear Ms. McCarthy,

Just rec'd the August issue of *Realms* and wanted to praise you and your staff for commendable work. This edition was full of the wonderful stories and articles that find me hard-pressed to wait another two months for the next issue. I especially enjoyed "The Fourth Law of Power" by Richard Parks I also want to mention how much I love the cover art. Gustafson's "Merlin and Arthur" was a great choice for this issue. Even now, I find myself eagerly awaiting what you will have to offer me next

Sincerely,
Wesley Jones
Spiceland, IN

Dear Ms. McCarthy,

I had to write and let you know that it was a pleasure to receive the latest issue of your fine magazine, with the cover entitled "Merlin and Arthur," by Scott Gustafson. What a refreshing change from your usual "babe" covers!

Thank you,
Delia Morris
New York, NY

Dear Shawna,

"Say it ain't so ..." Please tell me your magazine has not gone the way of Harry Potter ... Please tell me that you haven't changed the format of *Realms*' cover art from rather sexy stuff to fairy-tale drivel! (August issue.)

Brendon Kaye
East Berkshire, VT

Dear Ms. McCarthy,

While I normally enjoy the high quality of the content, both art and words, of *Realms of Fantasy*, I was severely disappointed by "Return of the Sun Gods," by Kate Orman, in the August 2000 issue. At least that was the title on the cover. The story was entitled "Cactus Land" on the inside. If that were the only editing error, I would not be so upset and angry.

Alas, Ms. Orman and your editorial staff have yet to learn or employ the difference between "lie" and "lay." "Lie" is intransitive and does not take a direct object; "lay" is transitive and does take a direct object. This is made painfully clear on page 35 with "Rose Last is laying across her bed at an angle ..."and "days spent laying around watching her do homework." Again, page 36, "He's laying in the shade." These sentences prompt the reader to ask "laying what?" Eggs? Carpet? Tile ... or even "laying whom?"!

This type of gross error made me stop twice before reading the rest of the magazine, with teeth clenched in anger and disappointment

Published materials, and their editors, have a responsibility to present proper, standard grammar. Proper grammar is learned and reinforced by what is presented as acceptable. Your magazine has always pleased me in the past, I hope this was merely an aberration in your standards, not a trend.

Respectfully,
Lori Kissell
Fredericksburg, VA

Note: "Return of the Sun Gods" is not the title of Ms. Orman's piece. It is the cover "tease." The same with the story by Richard Parks and so forth. If you were to look at previous issues, Ms. Kissell, you would see this is a common practice—not a dreadful editorial error, as you suppose. For example, in a previous issue, Jane Yolen's story is entitled "A Ghost of an Affair," while on the cover you will find the "blurb" "Jane Yolen: Ghost Lover."

Dear Shawna,

A WEB SITE! How wonderful that would be. My entire family spends hours online doing a variety of things. My favorite thing to do is to look up the Web sites from the ads in your magazine. I think that every reader you have that has access would just love the idea of a *Realms of Fantasy* Web site!

Please give it serious consideration

Sincerely,
Kim Jackson
Newton, IA

We have recently put up a Web site at www.scifinow.com where you will be able to access stories from past issues.

Dear *Realms of Fantasy*,

First off, *Realms* is undeniably the best magazine I've ever read. The short stories are wonderful, the book and movie sections are wonderful—and I especially love the Gallery section. Good Fantasy art is difficult to find

There are two letters in the August 2000 issue to which I'd like to reply—if you'll allow it. I think Mr. Poole's idea for a Web site review section is great. With the amount of time most people spend on their computers and the Internet, a Web site would be helpful and lots of fun as well.

Also, I agree wholeheartedly with the letter written by Judy Schneider regarding the Harry Potter books. Schools could certainly do with a little fresher material on their reading lists and those books may be something to consider. Not only are they lesson-oriented, but they are entertaining and well-crafted.

My third purpose for writing this letter is to ask one more question. What is the usual age range of your readers? I am about 16, and many of my friends enjoy *RoF*—so I know it interests teens. Do you ever publish stories sent in by your readers?

Looking forward to my next issue of *Realms*,
Brandi Craft

We apparently have a wide and diverse group of readers—from teens to "middle age." The magazine entertains individuals of all ages and of both genders. Yes, we do accept unsolicited manuscripts from readers who also happen to be writers Make sure to follow standard submission guidelines when submitting work for publication.

In February 2000, assistant editor Rebecca McCabe gave birth to her third child, resulting in a brief maternity leave. Brian Murphy also left the magazine and Alison Cherryholmes took over (just in the nick of time, thank you Alison) ... At this time, a number of writers decided to become especially prolific after the New Year (do I hear resolutions in this?) and flood our editorial office with a torrent of stories We are just now recovering from the onslaught! In the interim, Realms has rec'd some nice and not-so-nice inquiries mentioning that writers have either not heard from us at all or telling us our response time is not up to par. For those of you inquiring in a polite and professional manner—if you have not heard from us by now regarding a Feb/March 2000 submission, I suspect we have not uncovered or recovered a box of missing mail from that time period Apologies to those of you who did not hear back in a timely manner, and feel free to re-submit or submit elsewhere. For those of you who have chosen to send out a less-than-polite inquiry—remember that the person who reads those letters and looks for your piece is also the one who decides if it gets a "second" read—also remember that we do not mind multiple submissions, in fact we encourage them—finally, to those of you accusing us of "taking" your piece without paying for it—if your piece was chosen to be published in this magazine, you would have a contract in your hand well before publication

Your letters are welcome Send them to: Letters to the Editor, Realms of Fantasy, *P.O. Box 527, Rumson, NJ 07760. Or better yet, E-mail to. shawnam896@aol.com*

Corrections: The artist for Saving the Skychildren *was Gordan Crabb, not Robert Crabb.*

The last few lines of **Luther and the Dragon** *were missing in the last issue, probably taken by the Gremlins that sometimes dwell here. Those lines follow:*

"Now, I give it to you."
He knelt and placed the tooth on the rain-softened earth. And knew that, at last, his father understood.

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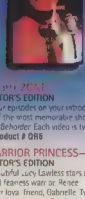

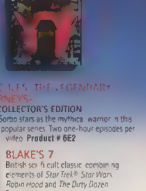

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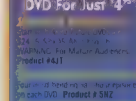

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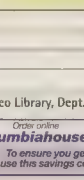

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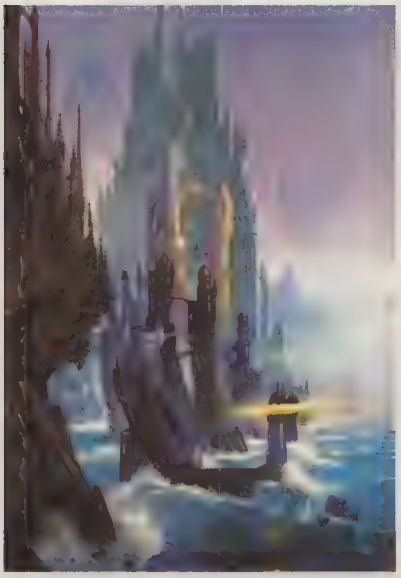
BY GAHAN WILSON

Three collections: one long-lost treasure and two modern-day masters.

THE APPEARANCE OF A COLLECTION OF 17 HERETOFORE UNPUBLISHED STORIES BY H.R. Wakefield is not only an occasion for celebration but a cause for astonishment, particularly since Wakefield—in a gesture which was completely in character for this bitter and compartmentalized man—carefully and efficiently destroyed all the personal papers he could get his hands on, including photos and manuscripts, shortly before his death.

H R. Wakefield leads you into a Gothic world of conspiracy and evil in his collection of short stories. Art by John Howe

If there are any among you having a liking for spooky stories that are of the grimmest and most ghoulish variety and who have, by some horrible misfortune, not heard of Herbert Russell Wakefield, then I am the bearer of excellent news for I can inform you that he was the author of some of the best tales of spectral grue ever written and you have some treasures worth hunting.



He claimed to have penned upward of a hundred spooky short stories in all and the best of them—among them such appalling classics as "The Red Lodge," "He Cometh and He Passeth By," "The Frontier Guards," "Horror Horn," and "Look Up There!" are decidedly and without doubt among the most successful in the language. Track them down. You will thank me.

Among Wakefield's major champions, particularly during the author's latter years, was August Derleth, the co-creator of Arkham House and the one who took it solo upon his own shoulders and determinedly kept it going through thick and thin and shot and shell so that it ended being sturdy enough to have survived his death in 1971 and still be active today.

There are some folk who bad-mouth Mr Derleth but if it were not for his efforts it's very much more than likely that such taken-for-granted, basic luminaries of the Fantasy field such as Howard Phillips Lovecraft, Clark Ashton Smith, and Robert E. Howard might all very well be moldering away in stacks of old *Weird Tales* and been totally forgotten save by a few eccentric collectors, note, too, that he also gave writers such as Ramsey Campell and Brian Lumley their first breaks. So what's say we have a moment or so of respectful silence for the old boy? Seems the least we can do.

It is pretty certain that the same sort of obscurity would not have settled over Wakefield since he was a solid success in his early days and continued to be widely printed well on in his career, but his fame did come to fade a little as the world changed and the markets did shrink as time went on and it is certain that Derleth's encouragements and printing of his work not only helped to sustain Wakefield's renown but to encourage him to continue writing when he might otherwise not have done so.

The Ash-Tree Press stepped in when Derleth passed on and the interests of Arkham House moved on to other areas. It became the author's new champion, bringing out reprints of Wakefield's books whose original printings had become both astronomically expensive and almost impossible to track down and there's many an earnest searcher, myself among 'em, who have blessed it and its proprietors, Christopher and Barbara Roden, for bringing out many of those books, such as

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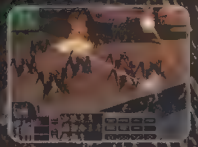

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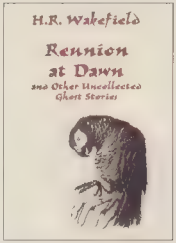
Old Man's Beard, once more and putting them within reach.

The specific hero so far as Wakefield's ***Reunion at Dawn*** (collected and introduced by Peter Ruber with an Afterword by Roden, Ash-Tree press, Ashcroft, BC, Canada; 171 pp., hardcover; $40.00) is concerned is Peter Ruber for 'twas he who, by a happy combination of Holmesian logic and good luck, figured out that Derleth had garnered and quietly stashed away a stack of Wakefield's short stories with the idea of eventually bringing them out in an anthology. He located them where Derleth had tucked them and, since Arkham House has shifted its focus from areas Wakefieldian, he asked the Rodens of Ash-Tree if they'd be interested and of course they were.

Naturally once all of this has gone through, the question of whether it's been worthwhile does arise. I am delighted to be able to report that it most certainly has been, for among these stories are some first-rate examples of the nasty, sometimes downright mean-spirited supernatural fun which Wakefield was so supremely good at.

Among the best of them I would put "Man's Best Friend," which is a thoroughly merciless exposure of politics in general and of one politician in particular whose career moves include, among countless smaller villainies, the murder of his mother. Needless to say—since one can confidently expect that the activation of cosmic forces in Wakefield's bleak universe will produce a karmic reaction of appalling malignity—he gets his and he gets it good. It is also a fine example of the fine-tuned, exquisite sense of appropriateness in the retributions meted out by Wakefieldian spooks and monsters and evil fates in that, since the politician is a stuffed shirt, his supernatural doom is brought out by rowdy mockery and in full public view.

Other stories we can be particularly grateful were rescued are: "The Fire Watcher's Story," a fascinating evocation of the days of London during the blitz of World War II, which explores a whole spooky area of that horrific but weirdly romantic period which are likely to be altogether new to you if you're not well into your second half-century. "Parrot Cry" a beautifully-bitter little gem which calls those ghastly domestic comedies the late great W.C. Fields so enjoyed exposing us to; "The Bodyguard," in which a nasty little rotter gets what he asked for from as appropriate and coldly effective a bunch of golems one could ask for; and finally, I would like to particularly point out "Familiar Spirit!" (as does Barbara Roden in her excellent Afterword) since it is an extraordinary departure from anything else I've ever read of Wakefield's in that instead of concerning some grimly fantastic event taking place in a well-observed contemporary scene, it's an unabashed historical fantasy that's such a marvelously effective and smoothly presented period piece involving castles and evil brothers and other such Gothic mainstays that one can be excused for wishing H.R.W had strayed into this realm a few more times. Fortunately, thanks to Mr Ruber, we can now read this unique departure.



An absolute must for any serious collector

***Smoke and Mirrors**, by Neil Gaiman; Avon Books, NYC, hardcover, 339 pp , $24.00*

Neil Gaiman is a spectacularly entertaining writer; he has the sparkle and the glamor of a really first-rate stage magician, and his new collection, *Smoke and Mirrors*, is wittily and aptly titled.

Some authors are always completely invisible. With others you catch a glimpse or two of them as they start up their stories but, they soon glimmer and fade away. Gaiman is a continuing presence. He is like a "Professor" running a Punch and Judy show, an image he has played with extensively and very successfully. You are charmed by and absorbed in the wild gyrations of Punch and Judy and keep the corners of your eyes on the ever-lurking Hangman, but you are always mostly aware of the professor in his lurching booth—he really is the star of the show

Entire schools of authors go to all kinds of trouble to pretend they aren't magicians Ernest Hemingway wants you to really believe that this is truly the way it *was* in Spain; Theodore Dreiser's whole idea is to convince you that what he is presenting actually *is* Main Street; and John LeCarre's deepest desire is that you will go along with the notion that what he is showing you actually *are* spies.

There's nothing at all wrong with that approach and I enjoy it very much when in the mood but, just between you and me, it's really a total sham. The simple fact is that for all their apparent reality, Hemingway's Spain and Dreiser's Main Street and LeCarre's spies are actually nothing more than brilliant hocus pocus. Gaiman may seem to be something of a rascal and he may indeed even *be* a bit of a rascal but, when you get right down to it, his game is much more honest than theirs

His Introduction, for instance, is as kind as a Zen master and does all it can to alert the reader from the start about what he is up to. He begins it with hints of a story he had thought to write for a couple he knew and give it to them as a wedding present, but then tells us he abandoned the notion and, gave them a toaster instead because he realized the story might be too disturbing. After that he goes on to tell us the story, to write it down before our very eyes with nothing up his sleeves so to speak, only to admit a little ruefully, when he's finished telling it and our hairs are thoroughly raised and stirring at its appalling implications, that it didn't turn out to be anything like the story he had planned on giving to his friends for a wedding present after all

Now you can't get more straightforward than that!

Smoke and Mirrors is a gathering up of stories and poems that have, up to now, been scattered in anthologies and magazines and chapbooks, so they were written to satisfy all sorts of editorial demands and came from Gaiman in all sorts of moods. They range from genuinely soothing little fables to positively horrific shockers but they are all very beautifully worked and I think you will enjoy every one of them.

If you in particular, dear reader, have the good sense to get hold of this book I think you

will find a special bonus awaiting since a good many of its poems and stories clearly would be particularly useful and instructive and even subtly healing to the sort of person who is presently holding and perusing a magazine called *Realms of Fantasy*. There is, for instance, a story called "One Life," furnished in Early Moorcock which is indeed about Moorcock and concerns both the benefits and disadvantages accruing from perhaps a too intimate relationship with the likes of Elric of Melibone There is also a sharply fanged little fable called, "The Sweeper of Dreams" which anvone more than ordinarily given to strange musings such as yourself, would be advised to memorize and regularly employ as a warding mantra

On a more mundane level if there are anv of you thinking of writing a script for movies or TV, you should first seriously consider the obviously hard-earned wisdom to be found and pondered over in "The Goldfish Pool and Other Stories." This is a somberly hilarious tale full of tender, loving details all too true which describes with deadly accuracy exactly how it feels to find yourself simultaneously floating in the strange wilderness of Los Angeles and in the midst of what the toilers in that town's main industry unaffectionately label "development hell." Reading it might save you from suffering a similar fate and a lot of wasted time and considerable heartbreak, but it probably won't if you're seriously that way inclined

Of course there's no way in the world I can fight off making a short list of those stories I view with particular affection and admiration -mind I could make a much longer list!—so allow me to point out "Looking for the Girl" which explores the agonizing gap between foldouts and females in the male psyche: "Snow, Glass, Apples," which is a remarkable demonstration that in fairy tales as well as in life it is the point of view which matters, "Troll Bridge," which will make you at least momentarily feel almost as guilty as you deserve; "The Daughter of Owls," which I can only describe as a kind of gem, and for any gently ghoulish Lovecraftians such as myself, "Shoggoth's Old Peculiar," which is an unabashedly sentimental paean to the good old Innsmouth spirit

A charming book, in all senses of the word

***Magic Terror**, by Peter Straub; Random H. s, NYC, 335 pp; hardcover; $24.95*

Peter Straub's swashbuckling but superbly subtle talent is put on display to marvelous effect in this extraordinary collection of short stories. I don't know where he's eventually heading—nor, I suppose, does he—but it's surely going to be some awesome kind of place because *Magic Terror* is not only the latest book of his to be put into one's permanent collection, it is yet another demonstration of the steady growth of his talents and the spreading reach of his imagination

One aspect of his increasing strength is that as he dives deeper and deeper into true loonimess—incidentally dragging you along with him it becomes more and more disturbing to see what he sees

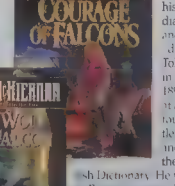
A lot of authors have got the hang of the very necessary art of how to frighten the readers by putting us in the place of the victims of crazed monsters: they darken the lighting so that we have to grope and peer; they let us have sudden, occasional glimpses of a wild eye staring in our direction; they allow us to feel the sudden brushing of a claw which almost, but not quite, grabs our clothing, and they describe our increasing faintness, the ever louder beatings of our heart, how our lungs labor unsuccessfully to haul in sufficient air as we hurry—hopefully away! from the fiend who menaces us

But this is only the first step and we know all about this already. We are all well acquainted with being victims, we are all only too familiar with our mortality.

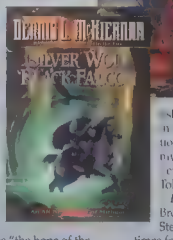
In any case, Straub has mastered all that and has moved on to doing the same with the second phase which is to show us, with ever-greater clarity and with constantly increasing depth of understanding and compassion, the unsupportable awfulness of being the monster!

BOOKS TO WATCH FOR

Courage of Falcons, Book Three—The Secret Texts, by Holly Lisle, Warner Aspect paperback, $12.95. A conclusion to the fantastic epic known as "The Secret Texts," author Lisle presents the reader with a final battle to end all battles. Skan shifters Kait Galweigh and Ry Sabir must defeat the soul-devouring necromancers called the Dragons A mirror of souls must be destroyed, a demonic god must be thwarted A tale of conquest, evil, and revenge—Lisle outdoes her previous stories in this, a definitive close to the best-selling adventure trilogy



Silver Wolf, Black Falcon, by Dennis L McKiernan Roc hardcover, $23.95. Best-selling author McKiernan is once more ready to rock the world of his loyal readers. Eye of the Hunter is one of Roc's most popular backlist titles. Here we have the stunning tale of Mithgar a magical land in a time of great peril Bair is "the hope of the world," and accompanies his friend, Aravan, on a quest. Mayhem, prophecies of doom, an Elf, and an Impossible Child make up the fabric of this marvelous and provocative classic Fantasy tale A ravaged land will be lost for all time unless our heroes prevail . . a Tolkienesque Fantasy



The Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien, edited by Humphrey Carpenter, with the assistance of Christopher Tolkien Houghton Mifflin paperback reprint, $15.00 This collection of Tolkien's extensive and artful correspondence provides the Tolkien fan with insight and enjoyment. Tolkien's assessment of his own work and the writing process are featured herein

J.R.R.Tolkien: A Biography, by Humphrey Carpenter, Houghton Mifflin paperback reprint, $14.00. A comprehensive and fascinating account of the life of the legendary Tolkien by an author who was provided with unrestricted access to all of his writings, diaries, letters, and even his doodling Tolkien was born in South Africa in 1892, orphaned at an early age taught in the Battle of the Somme, and worked on the Oxford English Dictionary. He was a specialist in Britain's ancient literary tradition and northern European mythology, and friend to C.S. Lewis. The quintessential read for Tolkien lovers.

Darkwerks: The Art of Brom, by Brom Paper Tiger distributed by Sterling, $21.95. An artist sometimes featured on the cover of *Realms of Fantasy*, Brom is both a cult figure and one of the most popular Fantasy artists today. *Darkwerks* contains art of raw imagination and disturbing images. An artist who says he is "trying to reach a happy sing-a-long with the many demons dancing about in his head ..." has put together a demonic collection of dramatic Fantasy images that should haunt and intrigue all who dare to open the pages that beckon ... I dare you to look away

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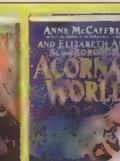

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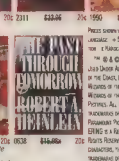

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Of course the really great ones such as Poe or Gogol always strived for this. They knew that while it was important and highly entertaining to write about the scuttlings of the mice, it was also relatively easy compared to the second challenge and they also understood that exclusive concentration on the victim takes the focus away from what is the really exotic and interesting character in the encounter, which is, of course, the owl.

But both these are merely preliminaries if you manage to get the hang of the first and second challenge, as Straub has decidedly done. Then you must move onto the third challenge which is the most intriguing of them all. Straub has done it, and story by story and book by book he enters unafraid, more deeply into it, carefully and tenderly examining the terrors of the absorbingly complicated relationship between the two protagonists of a horror story—the victim and the monster which pursues the victim. It asks and tries to answer the very scary question: What are the *two* of them up to?

One of the most frightening things I have ever seen took place on a hot, sunny summer day in rural Connecticut atop one of those quaint stone walls the hard-working farmers of yesteryear built to rid their fields of rocks and which are today treasured as antiquities and maintained by their owners at great expense.

We sat on our lawn on our folding chairs, my wife and I, and watched as our cat Ned stealthily made his way along the top of the wall toward its end where a chipmunk sat quietly preening itself. We thought of tossing a pebble to scare the chipmunk away to safety but then hesitated because Ned was, after all, part of the family.

A second later it was too late. Ned had sprung and had pinned the chipmunk down. He studied it with a toothy grin and then took its neck between his teeth and firmly, but rather gently, shook it this way and that. Then he put it back down on the stone and batted it with one paw and then the other.

At this point a bird called nearby and Ned turned to look at it. The bird was on a branch insolently near and Ned shifted to glare at it. The bird realized its mistake with a flutter and fled.

By the time this little distraction had run its course—it was, as I said, a hot summer day—Ned had completely forgotten the chipmunk, which was still sprawled on the rock wall where Ned had left him, and began to lazily lick his front paws. The chipmunk watched him do this for a minute or two and then, instead of taking advantage of this golden chance to flit clean away, he rose and chattered angrily at the cat. He was obviously furious at him for abandoning their deadly game!

Seeing an appalling little interaction such as that gives one a whole new insight into the nature of the hunter and the hunted.

One way and another most of the stories in *Magic Terror* (and mull over that wonderful title!) are working investigations of the sort of fantastic thing that went on between Ned and the chipmunk. Some of them, such as the exquisitely wrought "Bunny is Good Bread," are more straight horror tales than Fantasies (though sparks visible to children and cats do occasionally swirl about its villain). But others contain more than sufficient ghosts and monstrous monsters to satisfy the most demanding connoisseur of the bizarre-fantastic.

Some of them float very creepily between the possible and impossible due to the spectacular strangeness and profound insanity of their villains. For example, can you imagine a more appalling monstress than a huge sadistic kindergarten teacher toying with her tiny wards as in "Ashputtle"? Some explore classic Gothic themes as in "The Ghost Village" wherein we learn the late unpleasantness in Vietnam rent both this and the other world and unleashed a positively uncountable number of ghastly haunts. One story, "Hunger, An Introduction," is actually the confession of a ghost (I spoil no surprises; this is announced at the story's opening) and I promise it will give you a lot of fresh insight both into the possibilities of a life hereafter and the one we're presently working our way through.

And rest assured that every story in *Magic Terror*, of whatever genre, will be one of the best you've ever read.

Gahan Wilson

***Damned If You Do**, by Steve Aylett, Jeff Noon, and Will Self, Picador, 302 pages, trade, $13.00*

A trio of British writers—Steve Aylett, Jeff Noon, and Will Self—have over the past few years been burning up the pages of fantastic literature, producing postmodern remixes of many old tropes and themes. Now you can add a fourth name to that radical posse: Gordon Houghton, whose *Damned If You Do*, his American debut, takes the old notion of Death's apprentice and investigates the conceit so thoroughly and fervently and subtly that it establishes a new benchmark for the motif.

Corpse number 72-18-9-11-12-13-49, otherwise nameless, is selected randomly by Death to audition as the new second-string Grim Reaper. Dug up unceremoniously from his comforting grave and granted zombie vitality (still, those missing bodily parts are a tad inconvenient), our narrator joins Death and his three Apocalyptic pals, Famine, Pestilence, and War, in a shabby office building in Oxford, the innocuous HQ whence all human suffering is dispensed. Over the next seven days the apprentice will assist at seven fatalities. These deaths range from the gruesome (at an amusement park) to the slapstick (a hapless funeral director whose own clumsiness triggers a Laurel-and-Hardy death). Throughout the week, details of the narrator's own sad life and death trickle back into his consciousness, prompting him by trial's end to stake his whole future on one game of chance.

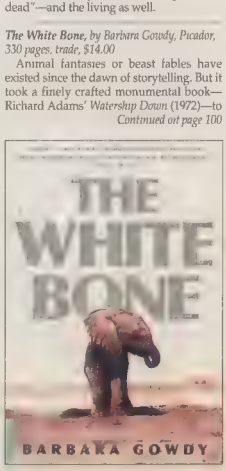
Houghton's prose is impeccable, a vivid, headlong cascade of wry metaphors, startling images, and witty wordplay. His characterization of the Four Horsemen and their nerdy assistants draws you irresistably into this unreal scenario. Alternately touching, repulsive, jolly, mordant, and merciful, this story shows more real knowledge of the human condition than many a mimetic novel.

This book truly offers "new hope for the dead"—and the living as well.

***The White Bone**, by Barbara Gowdy, Picador, 330 pages, trade, $14.00*

Animal fantasies or beast fables have existed since the dawn of storytelling. But it took a finely crafted monumental book—Richard Adams' *Watership Down* (1972)—to

Continued on page 100



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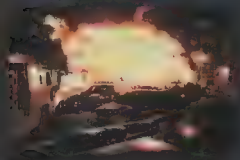

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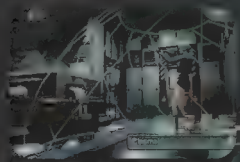

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BY RESA NELSON

A piece of cinematic history comes to undead life.

CHANCES ARE, YOU LIKE VAMPIRES. MAYBE YOU LOOK FORWARD TO TUESDAY NIGHTS so you can sink into a rich evening of *Buffy The Vampire Slayer* followed by its spinoff series, *Angel*. Maybe you're a devout follower of Anne Rice and her vampire novels. Maybe Stephen King's *Salem's Lot* kept you awake at night. Or maybe you just happen to find the idea of immortality intriguing.

Chances are, you'll be just as intrigued by *Shadow of the Vampire*, a new film scheduled for release on December 29 by Lions Gate Films and Saturn Films, starring Willem Dafoe (*American Psycho*) and John Malkovich (*Being John Malkovich*), and produced by Nicolas Cage (*Face/Off*) and Jeff Levine.

What makes this movie so interesting is its unusual premise. Consider this: Metafiction is a work of fiction that is about fiction. For example, John Irving's *The World According to Garp* is a novel about a writer, but the novel includes a short story that is "written" by Garp. *Shadow of the Vampire* is a "meta vampire film." It's a movie about the making of *Nosferatu*, the 1922 German silent film based on Bram Stoker's *Dracula*.

There have been other films made that have a similar flavor. When Johnny Depp starred as Ed Wood, he showed us the lengths to which Wood went in order to make classically bad movies such as *Plan 9 From Outer Space*. A couple of years ago, *Gods and Monsters* focused on the later days of James Whale, the director of *Frankenstein*, *Bride of Frankenstein*, and *The Invisible Man*.

So another movie comes along, this time about a silent movie and its director and stars. So what?

Here's the twist. *Shadow of the Vampire* has one foot in reality and the other in pure Fantasy. Its characters are based on the real filmmakers and actors. Although *Nosferatu* is based on Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, they had to change the title and names of the characters due to legal problems with Stoker's estate. Therefore, "Dracula" was changed to "Count Orlok," also known as "Nosferatu."

Shadow of the Vampire steps from reality into Fantasy by proposing this question: What if the actor who played Nosferatu had been a real vampire? What if the director cast him because he *knew* the actor was a real vampire? And what if the director kept this a secret from his crew?

The inspiration for *Shadow of the Vampire* began when screenwriter Steven Katz (HBO's *From the Earth to the Moon* and Showtime's *Fallen Angels*) became interested in Nosferatu. "I liked the fact that the film looks incredibly realistic," Katz says. "You almost think you are watching an old documentary about a vampire. I then got the idea of what would happen if the actor who played the vampire in the film was really a vampire."

The actor who portrayed Nosferatu in the 1922 German film was Max Schreck. "As it happens," Katz says, "Schreck is the German word for 'shriek' or 'fright'—it seemed a little too pat. I started to do research on (*Nosferatu*'s director) Murnau, and I saw this picture of him filming. All his crew were wearing lab coats and goggles. From that, I got the idea of Murnau really treating the whole thing as a documentary, as a scientific project."

A woman pure of heart, Ellen willingly sacrifices herself to defeat the vampire terrorizing Wisborg

The story of Nosferatu begins in Wisborg, Germany in 1843. A man named Hutter and his wife Ellen are living happily together until a real-estate agent offers Hutter a lucrative job—travel to Transylvania and sell Count Orlok on the idea of buying the house across the street from Hutter's home.

When Hutter blithely kisses Ellen goodbye and tells her that he's setting off to journey into a country of ghosts and robbers, she's understandably concerned. When Hutter arrives at Count Orlok's castle, he cuts his thumb while slicing a loaf of bread. Count Orlok glazes over at the sight of

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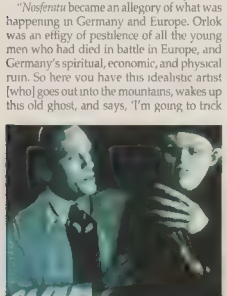
Hutter's blood, then pounces to suck it up. Hutter backs off in horror. He doesn't quite put two and two together, although he's been leafing through a book about vampires.

When Orlok catches a glimpse of a picture of Ellen, the Count agrees to buy the house. He then ships himself in a coffin to Germany. Hutter escapes from the castle and races home. At sea, the crew succumbs to a mysterious illness and dies. The captain's log reveals his concern that their cargo carries the plague. The Wisborg town residents are immediately warned to stay inside. At night, Count Orlok gazes longingly at his new neighbor from his home.

Ellen reads Hutter's book about vampires and learns that they can be stopped by a woman who's pure in heart and willing to give her blood. Ellen's response to this information not only reveals her true character but shows the power of silent films.

"What I love about the original *Nosferatu*," says director E. Elias Merhige (*Begotten*), "is this very ancient battle between the light and the dark. I think it's explored brilliantly in *Nosferatu*, because [in] what better medium than the cinema can that battle take place?

"*Nosferatu* became an allegory of what was happening in Germany and Europe. Orlok was an effigy of pestilence of all the young men who had died in battle in Europe, and Germany's spiritual, economic, and physical ruin. So here you have this idealistic artist [who] goes out into the mountains, wakes up this old ghost, and says, 'I'm going to trick



this effigy of pestilence, this monster that has overshadowed Europe, and I'm going to expose it to the light of truth, to the light of science, to the light of cinema, to the light of art. To the best in man instead of the worst in man. And then I'm going to destroy this being in an act of redemption.'"

Katz describes how he tapped into Greek mythology to shape his own world of vampires. "One of the great, fun things about doing vampire movies is that you get to make up your own natural history, your own kind of Darwin. In my little vampire universe, the men age ceaselessly and the women don't. There's a poem that [Willem Dafoe] keeps reciting throughout the movie. It's a Tennyson poem, 'Tithonus.' Tithonus was the beautiful Greek youth whom the goddess of dawn spotted and fell in love with. She asked Zeus to give him immortal life. Zeus gave it to him but forgot to give him immortal youth. So Tithonus ages constantly. There's a sexual aspect of what it's like to grow old as a man and feel yourself to be persistently, constantly, less desirable, while all around you there's an endless stream of young, beautiful men and women coming up beneath you that I wanted to try to capture."

Nosferatu is a film full of haunting images and a chilling picture of a vampire. Count Orlok has enormous, black-encircled eyes, strangely pointed ears, and impossibly long fingernails. He's a hideously ugly predator.

The director Murnau (portrayed by John Malkovich) tells his crew that Schreck is a method actor who insists on being seen only in full make-up and costume, and that his scenes will only be filmed at night. The actors in *Shadow of the Vampire* had a similar experience with Dafoe. He underwent four hours of make-up every day to transform into Max Schreck as Count Orlok. "I would be the first one on set every morning, and I'd be the last to leave," Dafoe says. "And a lot of the crew and a lot of people I worked with only saw me in make-up." This aided Dafoe's colleagues in how their characters interacted with him on screen.

There's already Oscar speculation about Dafoe, who previously won an Oscar nomination for his performance in *Platoon*. "It was extremely well received," Katz says of its screening at the Cannes Film Festival. "There was a lot of positive buzz."

Considering that Martin Landau won an Academy Award for his portrayal of Bela Lugosi in *Ed Wood*, and that *Gods and Monsters* won for Best Screenplay Adaptation, it's not a far-fetched idea that Dafoe will get an Oscar nod for his portrayal of Max Schreck.

"The most important research tool was the footage," Dafoe says. "The only thing I could find out about Max was that a biographer of Murnau said he was 'an actor of no distinction.' But the script was very strong, and we had the actual *Nosferatu* film as a kind of touchstone and base. So much had to wait until I got into the prosthetic. I didn't just have extreme make-up, but also a costume that was restricting. The shoes made me walk a particular way. The padding in the clothes made me walk a particular way. It was great because it's a huge mask, which frees you up so much. I think you just feel safe." Dafoe notes that part of that safety is a matter of not feeling the need to protect his own image. If you're hidden by a mask, your literal image is hidden. Another part of that safety was being able to act upon impulses that wearing the make-up and costume inspired.

Merhige talks about his vision of vampires and Dafoe's work in portraying Max Schreck. "The thing that I always wanted out of the vampire in this movie is a powerful, romantic being who is like a decaying nobleman who's lost in his own memories that have decayed. And yet he's doomed to walk as a figure of dust. It's something that's quite beautiful.

"I think that Willem absolutely gets a hold on these ideas in the most stunningly brilliant way imaginable.

"One minute he's a cat, the next moment he's a snake. Then he's like an old spinster who's trying to bargain with Murnau. He really is like a great dancer. The control that he has with his body, and the grace that he has in his movements. And the awareness that he has of bringing something very complex to his movements and making them look effortless. What a wonderful talent."

Dafoe discusses his own take on vampires. "People love to get scared. They love to deal with the boogey man and the undead. People are always, in various ways, avoiding their mortality. Thus the idea of the undead coming back to feed on the living is kind of comforting in a way. That's pretty cool stuff. It's close to our nightmares and daydreams."

Shadow of the Vampire explores vampirism on different levels. One level is how individuals can act in a vampire-like way toward each other. Another level is how the act of making a movie can be an act of vampirism.

Merhige explains how these different levels work: "[*Shadow of the Vampire*] layers in many serious metaphors about the nature of vampirism, the nature of filmmaking and the relationship between movie making and vampirism. The relationship between the film director and the vampire. All of these things are ideas that I very much wanted to explore in the context of film, and this film provided the perfect dramatic vehicle to explore these notions and ideas in a very serious way, but with some wonderful smatterings of humor. And humor is something that's very important in this film. I never saw this film as a comedy, and I never saw the film as slap-sticky, but I always did see the film as being funny in the sense that when

TOP LEFT: A vampire pretending to be an actor pretending to be a vampire. BELOW LEFT: Joan Markowitch, as Martha Ayers, in Merhige's next movie ABOVE: Hatter could become Nosferatu's next meal. BELOW: Willem Dafoe begins his transformation into Max Schreck as Count Orlok

you're looking into a person's seriousness, you're looking into a person's obsession, you're portraying a character, that in itself can be very funny."

One of the techniques that Merhige uses in this film is the way certain shots are shown, like the opening and closing of the iris in the human eye. It's a technique that's also used in the film *Nosferatu*

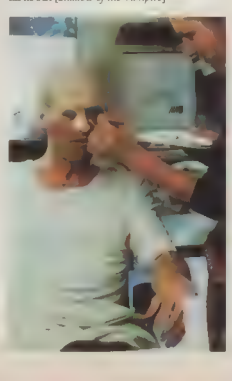
"When I read the script for the first time," Merhige says, "I knew exactly how the film needed to be shot, how the film felt stylistically. The iris going in and out was something I saw in the first reading of the script. This idea of moving out of one world into another world. The idea that the flesh, blood, and life of the image are drawn out, like a vampire. The camera becomes an actual vampire."

When Merhige finished shooting on location in Luxembourg and was flying back to the United States, he had a moment of doubt. "When I was heading back from Europe, I was a bit down on myself, thinking, Nobody cares about *Nosferatu*, nobody cares about Murnau," Merhige says. "When I came through Customs in Newark, after having been out of the country for almost 17 months, I cleared Customs without any effort, which surprised me. And then this Customs officer chased me down and asked me if I had any fruit or live animals.

"And I thought, OK, this is just a setup to tear all my bags apart and inspect everything. But then he asks me, 'Well, what do you do for a living?'

"I told him I'm a film director. He said, 'Oh, yeah? What are you working on?' And I told him the name of the film, *Shadow of the Vampire*. Then he calls four or five of these other customs officers, and they all came over. They're all standing around me. And he said, 'You know what the greatest vampire movie ever made is?' And I said, 'What?'

"Here's a guy with a three-feet-thick Brooklyn accent. He's not a film scholar, he's not an intellectual, he's just a guy. He's the first human being I've had a conversation with in the U.S. after being gone for so long. He said, 'The greatest vampire film ever made was a film made in 1922 called *Nosferatu* by a guy named Murnau.' And I just slapped this guy on the back, and I told him all about [*Shadow of the Vampire*]



"I took that as the greatest sign, because I'd just been thinking about this on the plane. I took it as a wonderful omen that people will appreciate it. And even if they don't know *Nosferatu*, and they're not experts on silent cinema or Murnau, it's still an interesting film and has the capacity to entertain an audience."

Now that Merhige's moment of doubt has passed, he's happy with *Shadow of the Vampire* "It's intoxicating and yet delicate. I like the fact that it turns into complete intoxicated madness at the end. It has profound elements and atmosphere—it makes you think about things you normally wouldn't think about. And I think there's a freshness to the film where it doesn't become a homage to anything. It's respectful of history, it's respectful of *Nosferatu*, but it follows its own voice and its own tune and cadence, and that's what I really love most about the film.

"This is definitely not like your traditional vampire film where the vampire's eyes begin to glow. For me, real horror doesn't need blood. Real horror is in the mind.

"I love a movie that makes me think about it for more than the duration of the time it took to watch it. Those are the films that I want to see. That's the way I want to make films. Engage people so that they're entertained and they think about things they either have never thought about before or have thought about but they're now able to think about those things deeper and further."

You may be interested in seeing *Nosferatu* before watching *Shadow of the Vampire*. If your local library or video store doesn't have a copy, you can order it from Kino.com, Amazon.com, or other video sources.

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BY TERRI WINDLING

Les contes de fées: The literary fairy tales of France.

THE TERM *FAIRY TALE*, NOW USED AS A GENERIC LABEL FOR MAGICAL STORIES FOR CHILDREN, comes from the French term *conte de fées*, coined for a group of 17th-century tales written for adults. These stories have come down through the years in simplified forms adapted for children: *Sleeping Beauty*, *Cinderella*, *Queen Cat*, *The White Deer*, and *Donkeyskin*, among others. They have their roots deep in the oral folk tradition, but they are not anonymous folk tales themselves—they are literary works by a group of Parisian authors, enormously popular in their day, who can, in some respects, be compared with modern writers of Fantasy fiction. In this column, we're going to go back to the later days of reign of the Louis XIV and take a closer look at the fairy tales of 17th- and 18th-century France.

The rococo language of fairy tales like Puss in Boots *was used to disguise the critiques of court life*

First, we need to distinguish between the oral folk tales and literary fairy tales of Europe. Magical folk tales have been part of the storytelling tradition since the dawn of time—including stories of fairies, sorcerers, witches, and human folk under enchantment. Folk tales are humbler stories than the great cosmological myth cycles or long heroic Romances, and as such have been passed through the generations largely by the lower caste portions of society: women, peasants, slaves, and outcast groups such as the gypsies. The literary fairy tale, by contrast, began as an art form of the upper classes—made possible by advances in printing methods and rising literacy. Literary fairy tales borrow heavily from the oral folk tales of the peasant tradition (as well as from myth, Romance, and literary sources like Apuleius's *Golden Ass* and Boccaccio's *Decameron*), but these motifs are crafted and reworked through a single author's imagination. The earliest literary fairy tales we know of come from 16th-century Italy: Giovan Francesco Straparola's *Le piacevoli* (published in 1550-53) and Giambattista Basile's *Il Pentamerone* (published posthumously in 1634-36). Basile's work in particular was an influence on the French fairy-tale enthusiasts one hundred years later, and his book contains the earliest known written versions of such classic tales as *Sleeping Beauty*, *Cinderella*, *Snow White*, *Puss in Boots*, and many others. Creators of literary fairy tales from the 17th century onward include writers whose works are still widely read today: Charles Perrault (17th-century France), Hans Christian Andersen (19th-century Denmark), George MacDonald and Oscar Wilde (19th-century England). The Brothers Grimm (19th-century Germany) blurred the line between oral and literary tales by presenting their German "household tales" as though they came straight from the mouths of peasants, though in fact they revised these stories to better reflect their own Protestant ethics. It is interesting to note that these canonized writers are all men, since this is a reversal from the oral storytelling tradition, historically dominated by women. Indeed, Straparola, Basile, Perrault, and even the Brothers Grimm made no secret of the fact that their source material came largely or entirely from women storytellers. Yet we are left with the impression that women dropped out of the history of fairy tales once they became a literary form, existing only in the background as an anonymous old peasant called Mother Goose.

In my usually reliable favorite reference volume, Maria Leach's *Standard Dictionary of Folklore, Myth, and Legend* (in the French Folklore section signed by Marius Bar-

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beau), we find this snide but common reference to the women writers of 17th-century Paris, in the heyday of the French fairy tale: "Folktales once more found their way among the literati when Charles Perrault published Les Contes de ma Mère l'Oyle, in 1697. Imitators, mostly among women, followed his example, the best among them the baronne d'Aulnoy (1698). In all this derivative literature, the traditional stories served as a pretext to 'belle-lettres' according to the artificial tastes of the period, they were rearranged, developed, and pampered, yet became household familiars." Dismissive statements of this sort have stood unchallenged until fairy-tale scholars in recent years (Jack Zipes, Marina Warner, and Lewis Seifert foremost among them) began to reclaim the history of French contes de fées by studying the actual publications of the period, along with critical works, diaries, and correspondence. Thus we now know that when Charles Perrault first turned to writing fairy tales, he was joining an already-established, immensely popular fairy-tale movement that had begun over 20 years earlier, at least as early as 1670, among a group of nonconformist (and somewhat scandalous) upper-class women. Madame d'Aulnoy, contrary to the citation above, didn't "imitate" Perrault—she pre-dated him. D'Aulnoy was famed throughout the city for the stories she told in her rue Saint-benoit *salon* beginning in 1685—tales that she began to write down and publish in 1690. (Perrault, who moved in the same social circles, would have known these tales quite well.) Perrault deserves his place in history for his lovely renditions of classic folklore themes—but that place is far more interesting when we look at the entire movement he was a part of and responding to.

Prior to the 17th century, French folk tales were considered the vulgar province of the peasantry, although members of the upper-classes often knew such tales via nurses and servants. In the mid-17th century, a vogue for magical tales emerged among the intellectuals who frequented the *salons* of Paris. These *salons* were regular gatherings hosted by prominent aristocratic women, where women and men could gather together to discuss the issues of the day. At court, contact between men and women was socially constrained and ritualized; many topics of conversation were considered inappropriate for well-bred ladies. In the 1630s, disaffected women began to gather in their own living rooms (*salons*) in order to discuss the topics of their choice: arts and letters, politics (carefully, for the Sun King's spies were everywhere), and social matters of immediate concern to the women of their class: marriage, love, financial and physical independence, and access to education. This was a time when women were barred from schools and universities when arranged marriages were the norm, divorce virtually unheard of, birth control methods primitive, and death by childbirth common. These women, and the sympathetic men who were increasingly attracted to their lively gatherings, came to be called *précieuses*, for they perfected a witty, inventive, *précieux* mode of conversation rather like the bon mots popular in the Aesthetic movement of Oscar Wilde's day. (Although "precious" is the English translation of *précieux*, the French term didn't carry derogatory connotations.) Some of the most gifted women writers of the period came out of these early *salons* (such as Madeleine de Scudéry and Madame de Lafayette), which encouraged women's independence and pushed against the gender barriers that circumscribed their lives. The *salonnières* argued particularly for love, tendresse, and intellectual compatibility between the sexes, opposing the system of arranged marriages in which, at its worst, women of their class were basically sold off to the highest bidder. They railed against a culture that permitted men to take lovers while demanding women remain faithful to men they'd never wanted to marry in the first place. They sought to control their own money, and property, and to travel without chaperones. Most of all, they wanted the opportunity to exercise their intelligence and talents. Encouraged by the success of the *salons*, women began to write fiction, poetry, and plays in unprecedented numbers—and to earn a living through this work, which enabled them to remain unmarried or to establish separate households. The *salons* became quite influential—fashions grew out

Beauty and the Beast, influenced by the "first wave" of writers, was written and recast as a chilren's story

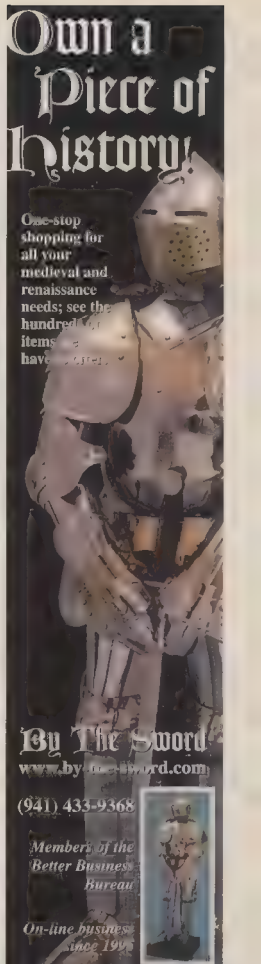
of them, artistic ideas, and even political movements (The *Fronde*, an ill-fated nobleman's uprising, was plotted in the early *salons*, and bold women *salonnières* joined in the fighting in the streets.)

Some time in the middle of the 17th century, a passion for conversational parlor games based on the plots of old folk tales swept through the *salons*. Each *salonnière* was called upon to retell an old tale or rework an old theme, spinning clever new stories that not only showcased verbal agility and imagination, but also slyly commented on the conditions of aristocratic life. Great emphasis was placed on a mode of delivery that seemed natural and spontaneous—but in fact people devised and practiced their stories before they trotted them out in public, and a style emerged that was both archly sophisticated and *faux-naif*. Today, these tales may seem quaintly old-fashioned, dripping with too many pearls and jewels . . but to audiences in 17th-century France the rich rococo language of the tales seemed cutting-edge and deliciously subversive—in deliberate contrast with the mannered restraint of works approved by the French Academy (an all-male institution). In the famous "Quarrel of the Ancients and Moderns," Boileau, Racine, and other literary men insisted that French literature should strive to emulate the classical works of Greek and Rome, while the Moderns (Charles Perrault among them) believed that the home-grown source material of French folklore and myth could inspire a vigorous new literature, free of antiquated rules. (Stories of ogres in seven-league boots were the true inheritors of the Homeric tradition, Perrault argued, not odes composed in Latin.) The King eventually ruled in favor of the Ancients, but Modern literary experimentation continued to go on with popular (if not critical) support—particularly in the world of the *salons*, where women writers often had no choice but to boldly take up the Modern cause. Largely self-educated, few of them could read and write in Latin.

The rococo language of the fairy tales also served another important function—disguising the subversive subtext of the stories and sliding them past the court censors. Critiques of court life (and even of the King) were embedded in flowery utopian tales and in dark, sharply dystopian ones. Not surprisingly, the tales by women often featured young (but clever) aristocratic girls whose lives were controlled by the arbitrary whims of fathers, kings, and elderly wicked fairies—as well as tales in which groups of wise fairies (i.e. intelligent, independent women) stepped in and put all to rights. D'Aulnoy, as her contemporaries note, was a major force behind the fairy-tale vogue and the first to publish her *salon* tales, but she was soon followed by a number of other writers (Mme. de Murat, Mlle. L'Héritier, Mlle. Bernard, Mlle de la Force, etc.)—most of whom knew and were influenced by each other to varying degrees. Although d'Aulnoy's name is largely left out of the canon (you'll find numerous Perrault collections, for example, and none devoted to d'Aulnoy), her tales are still retold today, republished in modern bowdlerized forms: *The White Cat*, *The White Deer*, *Green Snake*, *The Yellow Dwarf*, *Bluecrest*, *The Royal Ram*, and other magical works

Madame d'Aulnoy's own history is almost as fantastical as any of her stories. Marie-Catherine Le Jumel de Barneville was born in Normandy in 1650, and received a modest convent education—arranged for her by Francois de la Motte, Baron d'Aulnoy, a wealthy aristocrat 30 years her senior. When Marie-Catherine was 15 or 16, the Baron abducted her from the convent (with the connivance of her father, who profited financially) and a forced marriage ensued—from which, in that time and place, there was no possibility of divorce. The Baron was famed for his dissolute habits, including drunkenness, an addiction to gambling, and sexual irregularities. Three long years later, it looked as though the girl might be freed from her odious husband when the Baron was arrested and charged with a crime of high treason against the King. Then the two men who had implicated the Baron recanted their testimony under torture. These men were discovered to be the lovers of the young Baroness and her beautiful mother, and it was now believed that the whole affair had been cooked up between the four of them. The Baron was released, the men were executed, and d'Aulnoy and her mother fled to Spain. The two adventurous women spent the next several years traveling the Continent, and may have been spying for Louis XIV as a way of regaining his favor. Baroness d'Aulnoy received royal permission to return to Paris in 1685, where she promptly set up a literary *salon* in the rue San-benoit. Intelligent, beautiful, and tinged with an aura of mystery, she soon formed a glittering group around her of nonconformist women and men (and then became embroiled in another scandal when a close friend killed her husband)

Henriette-Julie de Castelnau, Comtesse de Murat, was part of the d'Aulnoy circle—and another writer of magical tales with a colorful history. Born in Brittany in 1670, she came to Paris at the age of 16 upon her marriage to the Comte de Murat, quickly making a name for herself with her wit and insouciance. Her high spirits landed her in trouble when a tale she wrote was recognized as a thinly veiled satire of the King's mistress, she was subsequently denounced by her husband for wild behavior, immodesty, and rumors of lesbianism. Banished by the King to the provincial town of Loche at the age of 24, de Murat constantly petitioned to be released from this sentence, to no avail. She was kept confined to a Loche chateau for all but one year of the rest of her life—returning to Paris only when King Louis died, just before her own death. Yet even in confinement, she managed to maintain close contact with her women



friends, and continued to play an active role in the Parisian fairy-tale movement. She wrote and published a large number of novels and stories, and set up her own literary *salon* (dubbed the *Académie du domicile*)– recreating the atmosphere of Paris in Loche and scandalizing the town. Her best-known tales include *Bearskin*, in which a young king falls in love with a princess-in-exile disguised as a big brown bear. The bear wins the young man's heart through the elegance of her conversation and the erudition of her beautiful letters and poems. Unlike Disney-style fairy tales today, where a beautiful face is a girl's main attraction (think of *Cinderella*), this king falls in love before he discovers the royal maiden inside the gentle bear – in fact, he agonizes over his unnatural attraction to the animal and is greatly relieved when a fairy finally assures him that his beloved is actually human.

Marie-Jeanne L'Héritier de Villandon, by contrast to these authors, was able to lead a more self-determined life—partly because she was born into a family of scholars who saw nothing untoward in her desire to be a writer, and partly because she followed the example of her mentor, the writer and *salonnière* Madeleine de Scudéry, by refusing all offers of marriage. (A wealthy woman's patronage and the income from her writing made this possible.) Charles Perrault was her uncle, as well as her colleague in the world of the *salons*; she was also close to de Murat, to whom she dedicated her first major collection of tales. Eventually she inherited de Scudéry's famous *salon* upon her mentor's death, and ran it with great success as her own literary reputation grew. Scholars are now divided on whether L'Héritier (an early champion of fairy-tale themes) influenced Perrault or whether it was Perrault who influenced his niece. It hardly matters, for in all likelihood the two of them influenced each other—they were friends, they moved in the same social circles, they wrote fairy tales during the same stretch of years, and they drew their themes from a common stock of oral folk tales, as well as from Basile. L'Héritier is best remembered for *The Discreet Princess*—a wry and charming tale in which a king locks his three daughters away in order to safeguard their chastity. An evil prince from a nearby kingdom manages to trick his way into the tower, and then to seduce and impregnate each of the foolish older princesses. The youngest, Finette, is a clever girl, and more than a match for the honey-tongued prince. "Once this devious prince had locked up her sisters," writes L'Héritier, "he went in search of Finette in her room, which she had locked against him. He spoke the same compliments at her door that he had used with each of her sisters, but this princess was not so easy to dupe, and did not respond.... The wicked prince lost his patience. Fetching a large wooden log, he broke the door in. He found Finette armed with a large hammer, her eyes glittering with rage. 'Prince,' she said, 'if you approach me, then I shall split open your skull!'" In the end, the prince is outwitted, killed in a trap he has laid for Finette, and she marries the prince's gentle brother, the new heir to the neighboring kingdom.

Fairy-tales written by women often featured fairies, representing intelligent girls who would correct the mistakes others had made.

Catherine Bernard, born in Rouen in 1662, was not accepted at the court, but became a part of the fairy-tale circle and attended L'Héritier's *salons*. She resisted marriage in order to devote herself to a literary career, writing poems, novels, and tragedies known to have influenced Voltaire. As a fantasist, she's best known for her version of an oral folk tale called *Riquet of the Tuft*, published around the same time as Perrault's rendition of the story. Both versions are good ones, and thus it's interesting to compare the two, demonstrating the differences in tales by men and women of the period. In Perrault's charming retelling, a beautiful princess is cursed with stupidity by a malevolent fairy and then encounters Riquet of the Tuft, a courteous but ugly prince who gives her the gift of intelligence in exchange for her promise to marry him in one year's time. During that year, the now-dazzling princess entirely forgets gentle Riquet of the Tuft ... until she encounters him once again on the day she had promised to wed him. She attempts to weasel out of the promise, using all her newfound cleverness—until he assures her that it is quite within her power to make him as beautiful as herself, provided she agrees to love him. She does so, Riquet changes shape, and now he's as handsome as he is courteous. Perrault then ends the tale with the suggestion that Riquet may have not changed his shape after all, but merely appeared to be beautiful to the princess once her love was pledged. Catherine Bernard's version of the old folk tale is a considerably darker one, and takes a dimmer view of her heroine's prospects for happiness. The lovely but stupid princess encounters Riquet, an ugly and bossy little gnome, ruler of a wealthy gnome kingdom in a realm deep underground. He gives the girl a spell to chant that will render her intelligent, and then informs her that she has no choice but to marry him in one year's time. The princess soon grows witty and charming, suitors flock to court her, and she loses her heart to a man who is very handsome but has no wealth. Secretly, she ponders the dreadful fate that is awaiting her, and the day finally comes when she must give herself to the horrid gnome. Her deep distaste for the marriage is so obvious that Riquet presents her with a choice: She can marry him of her own free will and retain her new intelligence, or she can return to her father's house as stupid as she was before she met him. Loath to give up her intelligence, and fearful of losing her handsome lover's regard, she chooses the lesser evil and marries Riquet of the Tuft. The tale continues after the marriage, in Riquet's kingdom under the ground. Angered by his wife's continued aversion, the gnome avoids her company—and she concocts a plan to bring her lover to the palace. Her plan succeeds, and for a time she revels in stolen happiness

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. but the sudden bloom in her cheeks awakens her gnome-husband's suspicions. After various machinations, Riquet discovers his wife's secret, and he takes ingenious revenge by turning her beloved into a replica of himself. "Thus," writes Bernard, "she lived with two husbands instead of one and could no longer distinguish between them, living in fear of mistaking the object of her hatred for the object of her love." Whereas Perrault's version ends with a moral ("We find that what we love is wondrous fair."), Bernard's version ends with a warning: "In the end, lovers turn into husbands anyway."

A number of Modern, nonconformist men frequented the leading women's *salons*, contributing fairy tales of their own as part of the conversational games. The Chevalier de Mailly and Jean de Préchac went on to publish some wonderful tales, as did Charles Perrault, already well known as a poet and polemicist. Born in Paris in 1628 to a distinguished family of high-achievers, Perrault's father had been a lawyer and member of the Paris Parlement, and his four brothers forged glittering careers in the areas of theology, architecture, and law. Perrault became a lawyer himself after passing examinations at the University of Orleans, but he gave it up to become a court administrator three years later. As secretary to Jean Baptiste Colbert, the Sun King's powerful finance minister, he was able to wield his influence in support of culture and the arts. (He was one of the men in charge of the design of the Louvre and Versailles, for instance.) He began to write poetry, essays, and panegyrics for the King, and was elected to the French Academy in 1671. He was one of the leading initiators of the "Quarrel of the Ancients and the Moderns" in the 1680s, and in the 1690s he composed several poems and tales using folklore themes. Perrault produced three magical tales in verse, then a prose version of *The Sleeping Beauty*, and finally (in 1697) his famous collection *Contes du temps passé*. Perrault turned the blunt language and earthy imagery of peasant folk stories into tales that were urbane, aristocratic, stylish, and highly refined, disguising his more subversive ideas behind a façade of light, dry humor. His stories fit the fashion of the time, yet contain a few marked differences from those of the female *salonnières*. In particular (and despite his own friendships with outspoken, independent women) the princesses in Perrault's tales tend to be passive, helpless creatures, praised for their beauty, modesty, and quiet obedience. His princes stride off to seek their fortunes, outwitting ogres and hacking through briars, while the princesses sleep or sit in the ashes, virtuously awaiting rescue. Compare Bluebeard's wife, lying prostrate before him in tears while her brothers ride in to save the day, with clever Finette in *The Discreet Princess*, waving her hammer at the prince and shouting: "Come closer and I'll open your skull!"

Rather than beginning the rage for fairy tales, publication of Perrault's collection in '97 came close to the end of the "first wave" of fairy tales—if only because many of the major writers had either died or been banished from Paris by the early 18th century. Perrault died in 1703, d'Aulnoy in 1705, Bernard in 1712, de Mailly was in trouble with the King; de Murat was still under house-arrest in Loche; and de la Force had been banished to a convent for publishing "impious" works. Exotic stories from the Orient became the new fashion in the next decades—such as Antoine Gallard's phenomenally successful translation of *The Thousand and One Nights*, and Arabian-style pastiche by men such as Abbé Jean Paul Bignon. The Oriental stories comprise what's called the "second wave" of fairy tales, and lack the element of social critique that characterized the earlier stories. The "third wave" of fairy tales began with a host of parodies and burlesques, such as those by Anthony Hamilton and Claude Philippe de Caylus in the 1730s and '40s. By the middle of the century, however, several writers emerged who were clearly influenced by the "first wave" of fairy-tale writers, such as the prolific Mademoiselle de Lubert, best known for *Princess Camion*, and Madame de Villeneuve, author of the original *Beauty and the Beast*.

Madame Leprince de Beaumont, who published in London from the 1750s onward, was one of the first French writers to recast these tales as children's fiction. Working as a governess in England (after leaving her marriage to a dissolute libertine), she borrowed liberally from earlier writers to create stories that were moral and instructive, publishing them in the new genre of magazines for young people. De Beaumont rewrote de Villeneuve's *Beauty and the Beast* for an English girls' magazine, shortening the narrative and imbuing the text with clear moral lessons. Despite her didactic tendencies, de Beaumont's prose had a simple enchantment, and it is her version of *Beauty and the Beast*, rather than de Villeneuve's rococco narrative, that people know today. She wasn't the only one rewriting and publishing tales by earlier writers. Throughout the 18th century, stories by d'Aulnoy, de Murat, L'Héritier, Perrault, and other *salonnières* began to find their way into the pages of the *Bibliotheque Bleue*—a series of cheap and popular chapbooks distributed by traveling book peddlers. Intended for readers of the lower classes, the tales were shortened and simplified—and in this form, they started to slip right back into the oral folk tradition. Thus dialogue, details, characters, and plots original to the *salon* writers can now be found diffused into the oral folk tales of France and other countries.

Fortunately, the *salon* tales as they were originally written and published have been preserved for us in a monumental work called *Les Cabinet de fées*: an enormous collection of stories from the 17th and 18th centuries. First published in three volumes in Amsterdam in 1731, it swelled to an aston-

ishing 41 volumes, published in Paris and Amsterdam (and then Geneva) beginning in 1785. These volumes contain a treasure-trove of stories, the vast majority of them by women. So how, we might ask, did Perrault become known as the only French fairy-tale author of note? Elizabeth W. Harries addresses the question in her essay "Fairy Tales about Fairy Tales: Notes on Canon Formation." Aside from the gender bias, too obvious to need any explication, she points out that the next generation of fairy-tale enthusiasts were men like the Brothers Grimm—fairy-tale "collectors," not literary artists, who prized a simple, "peasant" style of prose, and were deeply suspicious not only of the subversive subtext of the *salon* tales, but of the very language used by the women and men of the *précieux* movement. (One can only wonder what they'd have made of Angela Carter today!) Although Perrault's tales were modern literary creations like those of the other *salonnières*, he adopted a simpler prose style than that of his "inferior imitators," as the Grimms referred to d'Aulnoy and de Murat in the Introduction to their first collection (*Kinder und Hausmärchen*, 1812).

The Grimms' dismissal of the other *salon* writers merely echoed the attacks the women received by the literary establishment of their own day. In 1699, Abbé de Villiers published a long Dialogue that praised Perrault while damning his *salon* colleagues, railing in particular against the popularity and financial success those colleagues enjoyed. ("Most women only enjoy reading because they enjoy laziness and the trivial," de Villiers declared. "Everything that requires a little effort tires and bores them; they amuse themselves with a book in the same way they play with a fly or a ribbon. So does it astonish you that tales and little stories are popular?") Rosseau wrote scathingly of women's fairy tales and the destructive influence of Fantasy, what's more, he added, "Every woman in Paris gathers in her apartment a harem of men more womanish than she." He strongly advocated the establishment of English-style clubs exclusively for men. He needn't have worried. The social and literary ground that the women *salonnières* had gained was already slipping away from them by the early 18th century. As the Marquise de Lambert lamented (quoted by Marina Warner, in *Wonder Tales*): "There were, in an earlier time, houses where women were allowed to talk and think, where muses joined the society of the graces. The Hôtel de Rambouillet [a famous *salon*], greatly honored in the past century, has become the ridicule of ours." In the decades and centuries that followed, the *salon* stories, except for Perrault's, were reprinted less and less … or appeared in bowdlerized form with erroneous or missing author credits. By the 19th century, children's books had become a thriving industry, and the French *salon* tales were plundered as a cheap source

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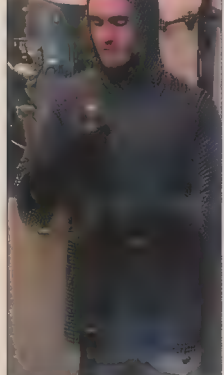

of story material. The tales were shortened, simplified, and given a gloss of Victorian propriety. Then they were often published under the name of that anonymous, illiterate peasant woman known only as Mother Goose, while the real women behind the tales were slowly disappearing.

Yet those pioneering, scandalous, *précieux* women and men were not entirely forgotten. At the end of the 20th century, their history began to be reclaimed by a new generation of fairy-tale scholars—at the same time that their tales were being rediscovered, reappraised, and retranslated. Such tales are providing inspiration for a whole new wave of fairy tale writers—Angela Carter, A.S. Byatt, Emma Donoghue, Margaret Atwood, Robert Coover, Tanith Lee, and Delia Sherman, among others. A number of fantasists of my acquaintance were raised, as I was, on the French *salon* stories in a volume called *The Golden Book of Fairy Tales*—translated into English by Marie Ponsot, illustrated by the French artist Adrienne Ségur. That single book cast a spell on us that has lasted right up to this day, resulting in careers spent studying, writing, painting, and editing fairy tales. I have written elsewhere (in the anthology *The Armless Maiden*) about the particular importance of fairy tales in my own childhood, growing up in a troubled household, and how the quests in magic tales can prepare us for the quests we face in life. What I didn't know as a girl was how very lucky I was to have that particular book as my introduction to fairy tales—containing, as it did, the stories of D'Aulnoy and Perrault, shortened for young readers but not overly revised—rather than the sugary Disney-style tales most children are confronted with today. I also didn't know that those tales were connecting me—a working-class girl in 20th-century America—with a group of strong-minded, upper-class women who had grouped together in 17th-century Paris, and had struggled, as I did, against societal expectations for an education and independence. The subversive message of their tales was buried deep in rococo imagery of fairies, princesses, diamonds, and pearls ... and yet I heard it. I learned at a very young age not to sit in the cinders awaiting rescue. I picked up a hammer (metaphorically speaking!) and set off to seek my fortune instead.

I like to think that d'Aulnoy and her friends would be pleased to know that the "fad" they started is still going strong three hundred years later. There are still many of us re-telling fairy tales, using their symbols to comment on the lives of women and men in society today. We gather via writers' conventions or the Internet rather than in elegant Parisian *salons*, and we come from all classes and walks of life and not just the aristocracy, but in other ways we're not so different from our predecessors. Our work still runs counter to contemporary ideas of what constitutes "serious" literature—our names are absent from the roles of modern American writers, and from the publications and prizes that go along with such mainstream recognition. Our novels and stories are dismissed as trivial, as feminine, as Fantasy or genre fiction. And yet, like the works of the *salon* writers, they are popular, widely read, and avidly discussed by readers all across this country and abroad....And perhaps three hundred years from now Jane Yolen's tales, or Patricia McKillip's, or Neil Gaiman's, or Ursula Le Guin's, will be read alongside d'Aulnoy's and Perrault's, to inspire a new generation.

The two best collections of French *salon* tales come from two of the top fairy-tale scholars working today: *Wonder Tales* edited by Marina Warner is a delightful volume containing six tales translated from the French by A.S. Byatt, John Ashbery, Gilbert Adair, Terence Cave, and Ranjit Bolt. Warner's informative Introduction is a treat, as is the U.K. cover art by the master fairy-tale painter Paula Rego. *Beauties, Beasts and Enchantment*, translated by Jack Zipes, is a thorough and excellent volume on the subject. It can be hard to find, but an abridged edition was published in 1997 under the name *Beauty and the Beast and Other Classic French Fairy Tales*. Also try *The Fairy Tales of Charles Perrault*, a lovely little volume translated and introduced by Angela Carter. *Out of the Woods: The Origins of the Literary Fairy Tale in Italy and France*, edited by Nancy L. Canepa, is a strong anthology of critical works; Lewis C. Seifert's *Fairy Tales, Sexuality and Gender in France, 1670-1715* is also highly recommended; and Marina Warner's *From the Beast to the Blond* is the best book on the overall history of fairy tales. For a delightful look at French folk lore, try *The Great Encyclopedia of Faeries* by Pierre Dubois. For fiction making use of themes from French folklore and literary fairy tales, I recommend: *The Porcelain Dove* by Delia Sherman; *Elementals. Stories of Fire and Ice and Possession* by A.S. Byatt; *The Bloody Chamber* by Angela Carter; *Kissing the Witch: Old Tales in New Skins* by Emma Donoghue; *Kingdoms of Elfin* by Sylvia Townsend Warner; *Red as Blood* by Tanith Lee; *Briar Rose* by Robert Coover; *Terrors of Earth* by Tom Le Farge; *Provencal Tales* by Michael de Larrabeit; *Chocolat* by Joanne Harris; *The Coachman Rat* by David Henry Wilson; and stories sprinkled through the six-volume anthology series I edited with Ellen Datlow: *Snow White, Blood Red*, etc. Internet resources: *French Salons and the Evolution of the Literary Fairy Tale* (iabramson.web.wesleyan.edu/salons.htm); *Marvels and Tales: Journal of Fairy Tale Studies* (www.langlab.wayne.edu/MarvelsHome/Marvels_Tales.html); and *The Surlanlune Fairy Tale Pages* (members.aol.com/surlalune/frytales/index.htm) ❧

This article was the result of conversations with Ellen Kushner, Delia Sherman, Mimi Panitch, and Pierre Dubois in Paris in July 2000. I owe them all a debt of gratitude. You can find the full, unedited version of this article on The Endicott Studio Web site: www.endicott studio.com.

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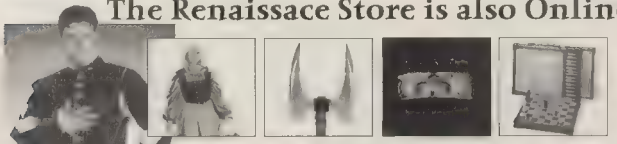

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RARE FIRSTS

Mamoulian sweated ink. Or so it first appeared in the dim light of the hot, slope-ceilinged attic. As generationally undisturbed strata of chimney soot, coal dust, airborne grit, and greasy cobwebs mingled with the perspiration on his furrowed brow and bare hairy arms, the stained rivulets came to resemble the flow from a press's founts, as if the heavyset laboring man were striving in vain to mint books epidermally.

Surrounded by tottering stacks of unlabeled, crumple-cornered cardboard cartons, by immigrant steamer trunks and age-descented cedar chests, by sad broken toys too memorious to be discarded, and musty vintage clothing redolent of dead dreams, Mamoulian resembled some Minotaur in a junk

By Paul Di Filippo
Illustration by Greg Carter

labyrinth And like the Minotaur of legend, his flaring temper seemed easily provoked.

An old fruit crate laden with Eisenhower-era *Reader's Digests* (the mailing labels addressed to "Burton Hollis") blocked his access to deeper boxes. He shifted the crate to a precarious new position, and triggered a small avalanche of photo-stuffed shoe boxes onto his loafer-shod foot

"Goddamn it!" He kicked at the spill of Polaroids and Kodaks, sending sheaves of photos skittering across the attic floor. The impact hadn't really hurt that much, but the incident served as a useful trigger for Mamoulian's impatient and growing sense of being personally affronted Look at all this trash! What made people regard the trivial and generic possessions of their lives as so precious? What made them feel they could waste the valuable time of an expert such as himself on such slight pretext? "Please come inspect my dear dead Burton's books, Mr Mamoulian I'm sure he owned something you'd be happy to purchase Perhaps one or two items are even rare enough that they'll help stretch out the insurance settlement...."

Playing on his sympathies, that's all such talk amounted to. Trying to get something for nothing. His hard-earned money for their useless shit. Look at all this crap. Back issues of *Time*. Book-club editions of old novels no one ever remembered even six months after publication. Mountains of the local newspaper Grocery-store encyclopedias That's what most people thought of as a "library." God help him, he might die of shock if he ever encountered a real library He couldn't recall the last time he had been privileged to handle a bona fide collection Usually the big dealers with connections got to the rich troves first, leaving Mamoulian to scavenge such dung-heaps as this And his professional sense of pride, reduced and diminished though it might be, would force him to examine every last box, in the slim hope that a real treasure might be lurking, despite all the outward signs pointing to the utter futility of his efforts

Huffing, dripping black droplets onto the lace of an old wedding dress, Mamoulian uncovered a final box Anticipating more gratuitous crap, he peeled back the interleaved flaps of the top

What was inside stopped his laboring breath

Gaudy paperback covers bright as the day they first hit the drugstore rack caught the spotty luminance from the dusty skylight like a heap of dragon's gold. Mamoulian picked one up tenderly, with utter disbelief The spine was uncracked, the cover unfoxed, the pages bright white And more germane to his monetary pursuits, this was a Jim Thompson Lion Books first edition of *The Alcoholics*, worth easily two-hundred, two-hundred-fifty dollars

Mamoulian set the treasure down gently, and examined the rest of the box's contents. All Thompson first editions So hidden from daylight had these books obviously been for so long, that the dead husband, dear old Burt, must have had a secret nor jones he didn't want his wife discovering Chances were, she didn't even know these books existed. Twenty five-cent paperback originals now worth a couple of hundred each. Over three-thousand-dollars' profit here—factoring in his hard-won knowledge, it went without saying

Quickly, Mamoulian layered a few *Reader's Digests* over the trove Carrying the box as if it contained his hypothetical firstborn, Mamoulian worked his way out of the maze and back to the attic stairs He banged his head on a rafter at one point, but made no vicious exclamation He barely felt the blow such hunter's elation filled his veins.

Down in the kitchen, the aproned and bespectacled widow Hollis stood at the stove, tending a pan of boiling water She smiled tentatively at Mamoulian and his burden, causing him to feel like some comic strip character soliciting cookies from the old lady neighbor

"I'm just making us some instant coffee, Mr Mamoulian I see you found something ..."

"Just a box of old magazines Generally, these things are a dime a dozen But I culled a few issues with articles on various celebrities—DiMaggio, Marilyn, James Dean. I can always sell those for a dollar or two. How about $25 for the whole box?"

The widow's smile wavered, then bravely reset itself. "Whatever you think is fair, Mr Mamoulian "

Mamoulian rested the box on the kitchen table, hurriedly wrote a check, then picked up the concealed rare firsts and turned toward the door.

"Won t you be staying for coffee?"

'No thanks Nervous stomach Gotta run."

In his swiftly accelerating old Buick, Mamoulian allowed himself a small smile that quickly broadened into a large grin and then transformed to full-blown laughter He powered down his window and reached across the seat to the treasure box. He picked up one of the crappy *Digests* and hurled it out the window, watching it are like a crippled bird. One after another the worthless magazines flew out to lie like literary roadkill on the highway s shoulder, reading matter for the wind alone

That sight should really give the widow Hollis something to puzzle about next time she drove into town

The phone at MAMOULIAN RARE BOOKS rang, and Mamoulian snatched it up

'Alex it's me Can I come over?"

Mamoulian sighed at the unexpected sound of his brother s voice, the nasal whine tempered only slightly by a shred of unwonted humility "Lev, I run a shop that's open to the public How could I keep you out?"

Lev Mamoulian remained quiet a moment, then said, "I've had more gracious invitations—"

"Where to? The drunk tank?"

"—but I'll come over anyway."

"There are 10 bars between your house and here Do you think you'll show up sometime today?"

"I'll be there in 15 minutes

"I'm not holding my breath

"Goodbye, Alex."

Mamoulian hung up the phone and returned to his interrupted study of several of his competitors' impressive catalogues Every one boasted a cyberaddress More and more, his peers seemed to be moving their bookselling enterprises to the Web Mamoulian knew nothing about the Internet, but suspected that it would soon supersede the old way of doing things, if it hadn't already Where such a phenomenon would leave him and other old-fashioned booksellers was not in doubt Even more in the gutter, subsisting on scraps, than he already was, if not out of business altogether.

Slapping down the catalogues onto his desktop, Mamoulian made a silent resolve to do something about getting online He was too middle-aged and otherwise talentless to change careers now Evolve or die, that would have to be his motto Businesswise, he had been stagnating for too long Surely his wiles and cunning would translate intact to the computer world There had to be a reasonable profit margin somewhere in cyberspace for the guy with a sharp eye for bargains and more hustle than his peers

The bearish Mamoulian stood up and, in the absence of any customers, began tidying his already-neat store Two small rooms on the fourth floor of an old office building in a fading downtown, a space about as big as your average soft-ice-cream stand Mamoulian could recall when his neighbors in the building had consisted of an assortment of professionals—dentists, lawyers, architects, jewelers Now most of the offices served as storage space, holding old files belonging to an insurance company that remained as the sole major tenant One office was bloated with bags of styrofoam peanuts—property of the Wrap-and-Pak franchise on the first floor—like some kind of dormitory prank. If his rent hadn't been frozen decades ago (Mamoulian had earned the undying gratitude of his now-elderly landlord by tracking down a copy of *St Nicholas* magazine the man had fondly recalled from his childhood, then offering it as a gift), Mamoulian would have moved long ago (But where to, he never fully visualized.)

Circulating among the shelves of fiction and nonfiction, the boxes of plastic-enveloped ephemera, Mamoulian dusted the familiar titles, many of which had sat on his shelves for so long that they had become more fixture than stock, foster children meant to be housed temporarily, yet

now immovable graybeards ensconced in their rockers. He polished with Windex the glass front of the locked cabinet that held his unsold rare firsts, pausing as always to admire the spine of the gem of his stock. But today he felt a need actually to fondle his baby, and so he unlocked the cabinet and removed the priceless glassine-jacketed book.

The entire print run of Doubleday's edition of Ballard's *The Atrocity Exhibition* had supposedly been pulped before distribution, under orders from the morally offended publisher. Yet in his reverent hands,

"How much?"

Lev lifted his head. "Two thousand for two weeks. After I get discharged, I keep right on with AA. Wilkins has promised me a job once I dry out. He said I was the best model-maker he ever saw, until my hands started to shake. Can you help me, Alex?"

"Get out of my chair."

Lev rose in defeat and began to shuffle toward the door.

"Where are you going? I just need to dig out my checkbook."

What made people regard the trivial and generic possessions of their lives as so precious? What made them feel they could waste the valuable time of an expert?

Mamoulian held a copy from that legendary printing. He had obtained it for a dollar from an anonymous street vendor on the Bowery during a New York City buying trip in 1979, but its authenticity was not in doubt. No one but a madman would have forged to utter perfection such a dubious title. No doubt some sticky-fingered pressman or warehouse employee had carelessly swiped it without realizing its subsequent value. Mamoulian knew that he could sell the apocryphal book in an eyeblink, but he had never even done so much as hint at its existence to anyone else. Owning it somehow validated his whole crummy shop.

Like a furtive Ali Baba, Mamoulian restored the treasure to its cave, and returned to his makework. He shuffled a stack of new orders—distressingly small—into ranking by date of receipt. He penciled the price of one dollar into a couple of loser titles recently acquired in an auction lot, modern self-help crap. Then Mamoulian opened the door to the corridor where he kept a shelf of cheap stuff designed to entice inside any hapless soul lost enough to end up here.

Down the corridor, the antique elevator bonged and ratcheted open. Lev Mamoulian stepped off and turned to spot his brother Alex. Older than Alex Mamoulian, Lev resembled his brother enough to cause both of them the pain of being forced to confront one's living too-faithful semblance, a truth-telling fetch sent to embarrass and chastise.

Mamoulian waited impatiently by the door to his store while his brother shambled closer. (A pane of frosted glass bore the store's chipped, gold-painted name). Surprisingly, despite Lev's damaged gait, the older man seemed sober and halfway respectable looking, his rumpled clothes unpatched by vomit or blood, instances of which Mamoulian had too often seen.

Lev held out his hand to shake Mamoulian's, who responded warily.

"Can I come inside?"

"You're here, aren't you?"

Behind the closed door, Lev scanned the interior of the store for potentially eavesdropping customers, then dropped wearily into the only chair, the one behind Mamoulian's desk. He knuckled his temples and grimaced.

"God, my head hurts."

"Sorry. I don't have any booze in the store."

Lev dropped his fists into his lap but kept them clenched. "I don't want any stinking booze. I'm checking in today to a clinic. That is, if you'll help."

Mamoulian balanced on the desk edge, near the cigar box that held his change-making cash. "I don't believe you. What brought this immense change of life on?"

"Roberta. She's going to leave me this time, for real, and take Avram with her, unless I dry out. I can't live without my wife and son. I've got to do it, no matter how hard it is."

"But you don't have the cash."

"No, I don't have the cash."

"And you want a loan from me. Another one."

Lev banged the desk. "Don't make it sound so sleazy! I'm not pouring it down a rathole. This time's different, damn it!" Lev's bravado ebbed as swiftly as it had flared, and he slumped in his seat. Mamoulian considered his broken brother for some time, then spoke.

After Lev had folded the check into his pocket, he asked Mamoulian, "Is there anything I can do for you, Alex?"

"Get sober."

"I'm doing that for myself. Nothing else?"

"You don't know any cheap computer guys who could set me up on the Web, do you?"

Lev brightened. "Avram's a whiz with that stuff. He'd do it for free just for the fun of it. He's bored as hell sitting at home this summer."

Mamoulian pondered the offer. "I'll pay him something. I don't want him feeling like he's working off his old man's debt."

"There's no danger of that." Lev patted the pocketed check. "You'll see this money back soon. You just made the best investment of your life."

"I'd like to believe that, Lev. I really would. Listen, you'd better get going now. I've got to try to earn the rent on this dump."

At the door, Lev said, "How are you and Mona doing these days?"

"Mona and I are not an item any longer. She claimed she could never envision signing her charge slips 'Mona Mamoulian.'"

"That's one useful excuse for breaking up, I suppose. Well, thanks again, Alex. Good luck with your book-hunting."

"Luck is only half of it, my friend. Only half of it."

The quiet underpopulated river valley spread lazily across three states. Once a hotbed of industry and commerce, its mills humming, its cities bustling, its casually polluted waterway boldly shouldering freight and travelers, the region now slumbered, generally ignored by cultural and business trendsetters, existing in a semi-detached fashion from the rest of the country. Pastures and farms had reverted to new forests. Cities had hollowed out, suffered for decades, then been either partially revivified or left to rot, in greater or lesser degrees, by civic and private capital. Like collapsing stars, the area's smaller towns had either compacted to denser matter or fallen entirely down black holes. The region's roads were second-rate, the last in the tri-state area to be plowed after each winter's storms, but its river was cleaner than it had been a century ago. The pace of life was easy, and the valley's residents exhibited a certain despondent charm, having learned how to survive in such diminished circumstances, if not actually to flourish. Overall, the forgotten land seemed not such a bad place to live. And from Mamoulian's viewpoint, the place represented his secret seam of gold: a small, twisty lode hard to work, but just rich enough to sustain him.

The junk shops and Salvation Army stores of the valley would often be salted with collectible books going for just cents on their real dollar value. The contents of the sleepy and musty used-book stores were hardly any more expensive, and frequently just as rare. Located generally in the most decrepit neighborhoods, run mostly by crotchety elderly men and women (half of them seemingly Libertarians, to judge by the piles of antigovernment bumper stickers stacked on their counters), these stores often outrageously rewarded Mamoulian's searches, despite the annoying heaps of Harlequin romances and survivalist senes novels he had to fight past. Then there were the antique-heaped barns and hastily arranged estate sales to consider, both of which often offered troves of books acquired by Victorian and Edwar-

dian robber barons whose lineages were now extinct (Once Mamoulian had discovered dozens of Wodehouse first editions in the office of a machine shop undergoing a bankruptcy sale.)

Taken all in all, the valley served as Mamoulian's private preserve, continually restocked with exotic species by fate and changing circumstances

Yet for some reason, on this buying trip he kept coming up empty-handed It had been six months since he had visited the region, plenty of time for its contents to churn in the mysterious fashion arranged by birth, death, and economics. But they simply hadn't For some freak reason, from one store to another he encountered only trash His biggest find so far, a week into the trip, a week of crummy motels and junk food, had been a complete run of *The Spirit* reissues done by Harvey Comics, purchased at a yard sale for a dime each from a pimply adolescent, and worth over $25 apiece. Not too shabby, but Mamoulian hated dealing comics They seemed déclassé and louche, offensive to his sensibilities, not the kind of trade he wanted to conduct under the banner of Mamoulian Rare Books

If he hadn t had someone minding the store, he would have cut this futile expedition short. But with Avram tending the premises, Mamoulian felt he could hold out a little while longer, in expectation of a big hit just around the next corner

As Lev had predicted, Mamoulian s 16-year-old nephew had jumped at the offer to help his uncle establish a foothold in cyberspace. Together, man and boy had first gone computer shopping. The chosen hardware now bulked alienish on Mamoulian's desk Avram had chosen a host server for the Web site, one that boasted the capacity for secure credit-card transactions. The kid had built a very handsome Web site, promising to add the bells and whistles later The gleaming image on the screen looked just fine as it was to Mamoulian Now Avram sat daily in the shop doing the data entry on Mamoulian's stock and dealing quite competently with the odd walk-in customer

On the day of his departure, Mamoulian had given the kid a $50 bonus in cash. Avram exhibited a sheepish grin, raising a forefinger to push back nonexistent slipping eyeglasses, until he remembered that he now wore contacts (thanks to Roberta's care, the boy would probably be m rags if his welfare had been left solely to Lev at his worst)

cadging a nickel of profit here, a dime there, just to stave off the human creditor wolves circling Mamoulian Rare Books as if it were a busted sleigh mired on the goddamn tundra

Despair and disgust washed over Mamoulian like slops thrown from a fish-wife s window, leaving him feeling weary and filled with bilious sludge Suddenly, the prospect of arriving at the little down-at-the-heels city that was his immediate destination, of crossing the worn thresholds of the too-familiar stores and seeing the same hostile, ennui-engraved faces of the race of trolls that rolled up the steel shutters of such places, of spotting the identical too-common worthless titles he had seen in the last broken village—this scenario struck him as a veritable hell on earth He just couldn t face it

At the next junction of roads, Mamoulian took an arbitrary turn away from his abandoned destination. He did the same at the next three crossroads until, after 45 minutes, he found himself in a part of the valley completely unknown to him. He paused by the side of the road to consult a map, but could locate himself only within a vague circle of territory He shrugged, stuffed the map into the glove-box, and drove onward

A neat if shabby roadside diner beckoned ahead just as Mamoulian's stomach was reminding him that another delivery was scheduled, the morning's hash, eggs, and toast being only partial payment for his continued existence. He swung the van across the gravel lot, parked, and locked it Little chance that any larcenous rube would want the eccentric contents of this particular van, but why risk it?

At the counter of the busy restaurant, Mamoulian ordered up coffee, a steak sandwich, and fries. He latched onto a rumpled copy of the local paper—*The Newbery Gazette*—and scanned the classifieds for rummage sales and the like, but came up blank. Typical of this whole trip. Why had he imagined that a few impulsive gestures would be sufficent to change his bad luck? Might as well expect a copy of the Gutenberg Bible to drop out of the skies into his lap

Working on a superlative piece of flaky cherry pie that went some small way toward brightening his mood, Mamoulian caught a stray phrase from one of his rural countermates

"—book sale."

Mamoulian turned to the local. Like so many of the valley s residents, the man wore in Mamoulian's eyes the appearance of some

Mamoulian knew that he could sell the apocryphal book in at its existence to anyone else. Owning it

"Gee, thanks, Uncle Alex "

"You earned it, boy. If I have a good trip, I'll sweeten up your next paycheck too. Well, I gotta hit the road now, before traffic gets too bad. Hold the fort against the goddamn Indians for me "

Avram walked his uncle out to the rented van Mamoulian used on such trips

"Thanks for what you did for Dad too, Uncle Alex "

"Purely selfish, kid He owes me for loans back to 'eighty-six, and I figure this was my only chance to get repaid."

"Whatever you say "

Driving down a stretch of crumbling asphalt, eyes shaded by drug store sunglasses against the August glare, Mamoulian shook his head ruefully What he had told Avram had been pure sugar frosting on an unpalatable cake He might just as well have ignited a pile of his hard-earned cash as loan it to Lev, for all the chance he had of seeing it again After a few weeks of sobriety at most, his brother would go off on a binge, and the whole downward booze-lubricated spiral would commence again Mamoulian chided himself for being such a witless soft touch What had he been thinking that day in the office? Flush from the big Thompson score, face to face with his pathetic older brother, he had plunged two grand on a nag hobbled from birth And now here he was, forced by the rotten circumstances of his own senseless life (had he actually made any more of his opportunities than his brother had?), out on the merciless road again,

outdated funny-pages character, a homely archaic figure out of *Gasoline Alley, Terry and the Pirates, Polly and Her Pals,* or *The Katzenjammer Kids,* as if the declining fortunes of the region had arrested the century's transfiguring hand, leaving the natives in a pristine state of American innocence. Mamoulian's prospective interlocutor resembled, of all people, Andy Gump

"Did someone mention a book sale?"

"Sure did. Started a couple of hours ago, out at the Caxton Daye Academy. They're looking to raise some money for renovations to the gym "

"Whereabouts is this school?"

"Just head west when you leave here. You'll see the sign "

Mamoulian instantly paid his bill and departed without finishing his pie or coffee

The road west of the diner trunked out into a leafy channel, and Mamoulian almost missed the shrubbery-concealed sign for the Caxton Daye Academy at the mouth of a badly paved drive. He swung a sharp left just in time, and motored up half a mile of degraded asphalt until a broad lawn opened up before him. The Academy seemed to consist of a single, large multistoned mansion at least a century-and-a-half old, valiantly but ineffectively maintained, as well as several impoverished outbuildings. At this time of the year, no students roamed the grounds Only three or four cars occupied the parking area At least one of those had to belong to the person running the sale, thus making

Mamoulian's immediate competition look decent—assuming some other dealer hadn't arrived first thing and cleaned the place out

The odors inside the building twanged chords long unstrummed within Mamoulian decades of paste, wet galoshes, chalk, and construction paper, not to mention the signature scent of old books Unerringly, Mamoulian nosed along the strengthening scent gradient straight to the room hosting the sale Presiding over boxes and card tables full of orderly ranks of books, three locals sat behind a long folding table, sipping coffee, chatting, and eating donuts A hand-lettered sign announced the sale's prices hardcovers, one dollar, paperbacks, 50 cents or three for a dollar A lone old lady with purple hair rummaged among the cookbooks. Otherwise, Mamoulian was the only customer

Mamoulian suppressed an impulse to chortle and rub his palms together like Snidely Whiplash Jeez, a week in this Land That Time Forgot was starting to unhinge his mind! No matter what he found today, he'd have to head back home tonight, cut his losses, and come up with some other money-making options

With an expert's eye, Mamoulian began to filter through the offerings like a whale sieving krill. A lot of the books were ex-library, bearing the stamp of the Caxton Daye Academy, which lowered their values considerably of course, but he nonetheless found quite a few good items among these discards, including, astoundingly, a copy of the UK first printing of Ballard's *Empire of the Sun* ($75 if fine, so knock it down by half) This odd synchronicity with his prized volume back home confirmed Mamoulian's initial sense of his luck turning Maybe his spontaneous departure from routine had been inspired after all

A fair percentage of the volumes seemed to be donations unmarred by institutional stamps or card pockets Among these, Mamoulian found a pleasing array of desirable stuff, including some *Photoplays* (but unfortunately not the *King Kong* one worth $1,500), the Armed Services paperback of Lovecraft's *The Dunwich Horror* (at least $65), and—whoa, Nelly!—the Random House first edition of the John Holbrook mystery, *The Man in the Cage* ($400) Within half an hour, he had accumulated two boxes of material worth a conservative $1,200 His retail cost: 35 smackers

Mamoulian lugged his purchases to the table where the organizers sat two old gents wearing bow ties and, despite the heat, sweater vests, flanking a trim muddle-aged woman. His lust for books temporarily sated, he spared some cursory attention to the woman Despite her tightly pinned mousy hair, high-buttoned collar, Betty Crocker skirt, and fuddy duddy shoes, she wasn't half bad looking Her pixieish face radiated a genuine pleasure in the simple act of reigning over this backwoods fundraiser For a brief moment, Mamoulian actually envied her poise and serenity, her seeming happiness with her simple lot in life Then he grimly pushed the feeling aside as she began to unpack the contents of his boxes in order to total his purchases. If she recognized any of these books as valuable and tried to jerk him around on the prices, she'd hear such a squawk about bait-and-switch tactics—

But the woman only smiled as she counted the spines, seemingly oblivious to titles and said, "Quite a reader we have here "

"Yeah, I spend a lot of lonely winter nights by the fireplace, just me and my Dickens "

The old gents nodded sagely, and the woman's smile broadened "Oh, you love Dickens too! So do I! We have one of his first books in the Hemphill Collection It's not for sale, but if you'd like to see it, Mister—?"

"Mamoulian Sure, I'd be happy to take a look " Might as well humor the gal, now that he'd cleaned out her sale Thirty-five dollars should buy at least a few shingles for the gym roof, right? Anyhow, she was probably inordinately proud of some 10th printing of some 20th edition of *A Christmas Carol*, but Mamoulian would lay on the praise Who knew, but maybe this sale would become one of his regular stops

After money changed hands and Mamoulian's books had been reboxed, the woman said, "Arthur, Fred, will you watch Mister Mamoulian's purchases and handle the sale while we step away for a moment? Thank you so much "

The woman led him out a different door and down a dim corridor deeper in the Academy. "My name's Emily Lerner. I'm the librarian here Have been for the past 20 years, and will be until I retire, I suppose The job's very satisfying, except of course for the lack of money."

Growing impatient and not a little unnerved by the eerie quiet of the old building, Mamoulian was only half-listening "Yeah, salary's always a bitch

"Oh, I wasn't complaining about my wages. It's true they're low, but it doesn't cost quite so much to live here in the valley as it does elsewhere No, I was lamenting the relative lack of funding for new book purchases Caxton Daye doesn't exactly attract the children of privilege and their parents' endowments But that's an old story In fact, that's how the Hemphill Collection first came about "

Mamoulian made no reply to this gratuitous information, but simply followed Emily Lerner impatiently as she ushered him through another door -

and straight into paradise

Paradise was a small, airless, shadowy room where dust motes danced above a worn floor of wide wooden planks, the whole interior poorly illuminated by a series of porthole windows high up one wall

Obviously, Mamoulian first observed, his awestruck brain working with some desperate attempt at objective precision, the single wall of shelves in the time-lost room held their contents not in alphabetical order, but in chronological sequence The relatively drab books on the upper left most shelves were jacketless, leather-bound and gilt lettered, as comfortingly bulky and solid as most other pre-20th century artifacts—such as stoves, say. As Mamoulian's eyes traversed the shelves left to right up and down, straining to capture intriguingly suggestive names and titles, the books morphed sequentially into modern, more colorful shapes trimmer, bejacketed, poten-

an eyeblink, but he had never even done so much as hint somehow validated his whole crummy shop.

tially lighter in heft Eventually, after his stunned yet still avaricious gaze had raced over roughly a thousand books, he stopped at a couple of terminal volumes that might have come straight from the "new arrivals' table of a Barnes & Noble

Hesitantly, like a sleepwalker, Mamoulian crossed the room to the shelves. As he got closer, names swam randomly into focus Thackery, Eliot, Collins, Fitzgerald, Hawthorne, Stein, Poe, Colette, Twain, Faulkner, Alcott, Mailer, Kerouac, Hemingway—dimly, he sensed the librarian of the Caxton Daye Academy, Emily Lerner, trailing him without speaking, as if respectful of his bibliogenic trance

Mamoulian reached out unerringly for a volume spaced about midway on the shelves He pinched it delicately and withdrew it reverently from its niche as if handling either a vial of nitroglycerin or the governor's commutation of his death sentence Where were his cloth curator's gloves? Back in the van, of course, useless now. But he couldn't tear himself away long enough to retrieve them Cradling the handsome, well-preserved book as if it were a premature baby or the withered hand of his dying grandmother, Mamoulian opened its cover.

The inner pages confirmed this to be a Shakespeare and Company first edition of James Joyce's *Ulysses* That wasn't a complete surprise, for Mamoulian had suspected as much from first sight of the book's exterior, seen previously in Sotheby catalogue photographs But the presence of Joyce's autograph below an inscription—"To Miss Rosemary Charcroft- long may you Bloom"—was definitely not foreseen.

This single book was worth at least $150,000

Mamoulian began to weep uncontrollably But unlike his sweat, his tears ran clear, no ink leaking from his dazzled eyes

Wafting a scent of lavender, Emily Lerner stepped past him, oblivious to his distress, or at least pretending in a well-bred fashion not to see his tears She blithely plucked a single book from near the beginning of the Hemphill Collection and offered it to Mamoulian

"Here's that Dickens I mentioned we owned "

Gently, he reshelved the Joyce, wiped his cheeks with the backs of his hands, wiped his hands on his pants, and took the Dickens

It was the 1836 Macrone first printing of *Sketches by Boz*, worth a paltry $1,200. A minute ago, Mamoulian would have trembled to hold such a find Now, faced with a whole wall of what he must inescapably suspect were rare firsts, he could only nod like a spring-necked dashboard doggie and murmur, "Very nice. Very fucking nice "

When Mamoulian shouted every diner in The Golden Goose—that pleasantly old-fashioned restaurant offering a serene view of the church-dominated village green forming the center of the town of Newbery—turned to look Mamoulian realized he had half risen out of his seat, and that his own dining companion, the inestimable Emily Lerner, had instantly flushed at becoming the center of attention With an exercise of extreme self control Mamoulian lowered his rear into his chair and also lowered his voice.

"I'm sorry I just can't believe that you let the kids handle those books."

"Only the honors students They're very respectful and mindful Caxton Daye attracts that kind of child And I always stress the age of the book to them "

"Huh? Date? Oh, you're making a joke, right? No, just lay the history on me, informal like "

Her smile dimmed "I'd be happy to."

As Emily began to talk, Mamoulian sliced into his steak and listened more attentively than he had a few hours ago back at the school, when he had immediately demanded to know the origin of all the rare firsts, and then cajoled Emily into dining with him that very night so that he might present a business proposition that would benefit the school immensely

"In 1827," Emily Lerner dispassionately lectured, "Caxton Daye, a wealthy merchant and trader, founded the school that bears his name in order to implement his rather stern ideas about vocational instruction One of the first teachers he hired was Amy Hemphill Her ancillary duties included the post of librarian. Unfortunately, the small library she presided over was composed almost entirely of ponderous tomes on farming, blacksmithing, weaving, and other practical arts About the lightest confection Daye permitted the school to buy officially was *The Pilgrim's Progress*

"A dedicated reader of borrowed novels herself, Amy felt that her young charges would benefit from exposure to contemporary literature She began to acquire a few books on her own, using whatever small portion of her wages she could spare. She kept these books separate from the Academy's holdings, and loaned them out at her own discretion

"Amy held her job for the next 30 years, until her death. By that sad but inevitable date the collection was approximately 150 books large Amy willed it to her successor—whom she never actually met—a woman named Virginia Norton. Amy's will also enjoined Vir-

Paradise was a small, airless, shadowy room where dust motes danced above a worn floor of wide wooden planks, the whole interior poorly illuminated.

"The age, the age—what about their goddamn *value*?"

Emily sniffed dismissively at both Mamoulian's coarse language and his concern "That was never a consideration in my mind or the minds of my students We are interested in literature alone, Mister Mamoulian That is the whole reason for the very existence of the Hemphill Collection."

Mamoulian picked up his wine glass and slugged back a hearty mouthful, then poured himself another generous portion. "Tell me you don't let the kids take the books home."

"I let them take the books home, yes."

Before he could speak again, Mamoulian had to refill his glass twice more "Jesus, Emily, do you realize what your goddamn Hemphill Collection is worth? Let me give it to you straight from the shoulder, no dealer-style bullshit This find is too big for me to play games. Pay close attention now Easily, no hype, I'm guessing a million Maybe more I'd have to examine each book individually to firm up the figure "

Mamoulian studied the librarian's relatively unlined, lightly cosmeticized, heart-shaped face for a reaction Demure, that was the word he had been searching for Yet subtly complex, with depths not easily plumbed Was she as naive as she seemed, or really a sharp player? Mamoulian hadn't been this flummoxed by anyone on the other side of the bargaining table in a long while

For the first time in their short acquaintance, the woman's face betrayed some signs of agitation "Oh my goodness I hadn't realized the Collection had accrued such value I wonder what Amy would think of such an outcome?"

"Amy?"

"Amy Hemphill, the first librarian at Caxton Daye "

"Oh, right " Mamoulian's stomach nudged him not to entirely neglect his meal, and he wolfed down a buttered roll. "Would you run the whole story by me again? I still can't quite believe it."

Emily's smile bore a keen edge. "Are you asking me to be a boring pedant on our first date, Mister Mamoulian?"

Her smile dimmed "I'd be happy to."

As Emily began to talk, Mamoulian sliced into his steak and listened more attentively than he had a few hours ago back at the school, when he had immediately demanded to know the origin of all the rare firsts, and then cajoled Emily into dining with him that very night so that he might present a business proposition that would benefit the school immensely

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"Virginia saw the Collection reach the turn of the century, and approach the five-hundred volume mark By then, of course, the Academy had become a more typical liberal-arts institution, and the main library offered its own share of popular fiction But the tradition of librarians purchasing a few additional high-quality books continued Virginia's successor was Rosemary Charcroft—"

"The gal mentioned in the Joyce volume?"

"Yes. Amy had established a tradition of securing inscriptions from many of the authors she selected, dealing with them through the mails While not every book in the collection is signed, the majority of them are "

Mamoulian moaned incoherently, but Emily politely ignored him and continued

"Rosemary passed on the Collection to Helen Castelli around 1935, and I took it over from Helen in 1979. During my tenure, I've added approximately 25 books per year That's a higher average than my predecessors maintained, but I don't claim any extra devotion to the Collection. It's just that books are cheaper nowadays than they were at many points in the past Helen, for instance, had an awful time during the Depression. I think she managed only three acquisitions a year during the worst of that era Buying all of Dos Passos nearly bankrupted her "

Mamoulian's groans simulated the painful calls of an unfed hyena Finished with her account, Emily turned efficiently to her meal, pasta with shrimp They ate silently for a while, Mamoulian trying to ingest both words and food

"OK," Mamoulian finally said, "I can accept five do-gooders amassing a private library over the course of nearly two hundred years But what gets me is the *quality* of it. Every book in your frigging Collection is a literary masterpiece. The lowest lowbrow item I saw was *Gone with the Wind*—worth roughly 1,300 nowadays, by the way."

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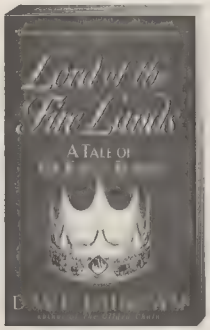

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"That was Helen's first purchase. She debated long and hard before she plunged on that one, she told me before she retired. She loved the book herself, but worried that it might be too racy for her students. In fact, she wasn't entirely happy with some of Rosemary's daring choices. Joyce and Hemingway, primarily."

"All right, so there were some minor disagreements among you. But still, you all seem infallible in your own way. I mean, what're the chances you five would pick nothing but winners? How come there's no F. Marion Crawford or Bulwer Lytton crap in the goddamn Hemphill Collection? For instance. How'd you personally decide to snag the first edition of *Angela's Ashes* before there was any buzz about it? It's fetching five-hundred bucks now, you know."

Emily dabbed at her lips with her napkin and considered the question. "I can't really speak for the others, but I suspect that my motives were also theirs. First off, we were all educated women from similar backgrounds with a certain level of taste who, though, what we liked. Isn't that the first rule of collecting, Mister Mamoulian?"

"Alex, for Christ's sake. Mister Mamoulian is my father."

"And second. Alex, we all held the enlightenment of our students paramount. We were determined not to buy ephemeral trash."

Now it was Mamoulian's turn to ponder. He shook his head uncomprehendingly after a few minutes. "It's still uncanny. It's like you all had some sixth sense for literary horse races. If you won that consistently in a casino, you'd be out on your ass for cheating."

"Fortunately for us, the headmasters of Caxton Daye Academy did not follow casino rules."

His expression earnestly overwrought, Mamoulian laid down his utensils and leaned toward Emily. She awaited his speech with seemingly sincere interest.

"The books in that room are being wasted, Emily. You realize that now, right? You could replace all of them with nice reading copies for a few thousand dollars total, and your honors students wouldn't know the difference. The texts would be the same, the kids wouldn't give a—They just wouldn't care. Believe me! And the sale of the Collection would bring in a million bucks for the school. You're hoping to renovate the gym, right? You could buy gold-plated dumbbells for that kind of money!"

me and I'll be on my way. Or maybe you don't like me as an individual. You think another dealer would be more savvy, classier, maybe do a better job."

"I didn't say any of that."

Mamoulian allowed a look of sudden shocked awareness and dismay to alter his face. "Maybe you're planning to cut the Academy out of the deal altogether? Is that it? I suppose the books *are* legally yours, since they've been willed from one librarian to another. I don't blame you for giving into temptation, Emily. You can still set yourself up pretty well with a million these days. But the ethics of such a sneaky pete move—Well, Emily, I never would have suspected—"

"I don't need a lecture on ethics from you, Mister Mamoulian. All I'm trying to say is that I need time to sleep on my decision."

Mamoulian shifted to an optimistic grin. Considering her naked ring-finger, he almost suggested that sleeping with someone might hasten the decision-making process, but ultimately decided that perhaps he had better not push his luck.

"I respect that, Emily. I really do."

Mamoulian had rented a room at an old fashioned motor court on the edge of Newbery named TEEPEE LODGE. The chenille-covered bed proved comfortable enough, but Mamoulian never slept in it. During what remained of that night, he alternated between laying down wide awake in his T-shirt and boxer shorts, fantasies of his fabulous future racing through his head, and pacing the floor barefoot in the mellow light from a yellow-papered lamp whose glazed ceramic body was shaped like a stag being torn by hounds. He had bought a six-pack of some local brew to keep him company, but after finishing two cans he saw a vivid image of his brother drying out in the clinic, and poured the rest down the toilet.

As early as consonant with decency, Mamoulian phoned Emily Lerner at her home. She spoke before he could even employ any of his carefully formulated courtesies.

"Yes, I'll sell them, for the sake of the Academy. But just don't ask me to be happy about this."

Happiness is generally not a prerequisite to making some serious money, Emily. But I don't think you'll regret this move. Maybe the

When Mamoulian shouted, every diner in The Golden Goose—that pleasantly old-fashioned restaurant offering a serene view of the church-dominated village green—turned to look.

"And what do you get out of all this, Alex? Are you an altruist?"

"No! I admit it! I'm a sharper, a hustler. I've always got my own interests foremost. But money's not the issue here. Didn't I play it straight with you about the Collection's real value right from the start? Pardon me, but the way I cleaned out your crummy bookstore shows I could've pulled the wool over your eyes on this deal too. Now, I can't buy the Collection off you and resell it on my own. I don't have that kind of capital. But with your consent, I *can* take the credit for discovering it, and I can oversee the auction. That kind of publicity could vault me into the big leagues. My reputation would be made, and my business would take off like the goddamn space shuttle! Oh, if you want to give me a commission of a few percent on the sale, I wouldn't fight you. But the main thing is that I get the kudos for the discovery. What do you say? Can we work together on this?"

Mamoulian reached out and grabbed Emily's left wrist (no ring graced the elegant tapered fingers of that hand, he noticed). She let him hold her for a moment before disengaging. Her expression registered genuine confusion.

"I don't know, Alex. You make a plausible case. But the children *do* appreciate the first editions, I think, at least on some level. They represent a continuity to the school's history, and to the history of literature."

Mamoulian sank back in his chair. "Hell, Emily, if you're determined on throwing away this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity, just tell school will even give you a bronze plaque or something. Now, when can I come in to catalogue the books?"

Why not start today? If it were done, then 'twere well it were done quickly."

"That's a quote. Shakespeare. Am I right?"

Emily sighed. "Yes, you're right."

"Stuff rubs off on you in this business, Emily. You'll see."

"I wish you hadn't promised me that."

The door to the dusky, book-redolent room housing the Hemphill Collection opened to Emily Lerner's key. Mamoulian and the librarian stepped inside, and Emily switched on an overhead light. Mamoulian had not noticed yesterday. The heightened clarity of the miraculous vision staggered him again almost as deeply as the original encounter. Regarding the rows of rare firsts was like looking at his own name in lights 50 feet high. Get a hold of yourself, man, Mamoulian advised himself. Remember your professionalism.

"Have you eaten yet, Mister Mamoulian?"

"No, not since last night. But I couldn't stomach anything right now. I've got to get to work. I'm going to be making extensive notes on titles and conditions. Should take me about three long days if I really push. When I get back home, I'll type up a catalogue that we can use as bait to snag a big name auction house. The books themselves can stay with you until we have a solid agreement with someone. They've been safe here for a couple of centuries, so I guess a

few more months won't put them at risk. Unless, that is, you intend to blab to everyone about what we've got here. Then I can't guarantee anything."

Today Emily wore a white blouse, plaid skirt, and penny loafers, almost as if she were in schoolgirl uniform. This woman could do with a makeover for sure. "No, I won't say a word to anyone." She walked slowly to the shelves and ran her fingertips lightly along a few feet of spines, producing a sketching noise that made Mamoulian wince.

"I know the children will miss these old books," Emily said wistfully. "I wish you could see their faces the first time they earn entry here. The reading experience isn't just words, you know. It's feel and smell and typefaces and bindings. Everything will be different with new editions."

Mamoulian almost yelled at her not to treat his books so cavalierly, but bit his tongue. Instead, he pulled on his soiled curator's gloves ostentatiously. Emily paid no mind to his silent rebuke, but instead lifted out a book from near the end of the collection.

Her voice was thick with dreams. "Raymond Carver. He was one of my firsts."

Mamoulian took the book away. "*What We Talk About When We Talk About Love*. Knopf, 1981, fine in dustjacket. Two hundred and fifty bucks, minimum." The dealer shook his head in wonderment. "Damn! How did you *know* back then?"

"I can't say. I just followed my heart."

"I wish my goddamn heart had that kind of savvy. I'd rent it out to Wall Street."

Emily turned away, but not before Mamoulian saw a tear crawling down her cheek. "If you want anything, I'll be in my office. School starts soon, and there's plenty for me to do there."

"Yeah, great, we'll both keep busy."

Mamoulian had intended to approach the Hemphill Collection systematically, but his eye kept getting snagged by random titles. For the first couple of hours he couldn't resist taking down anything that intrigued him, and just marveling at their rarity.

Trollope's *Can You Forgive Her?*, Chapman and Hall, 1864. $850.

Kerouac's *On the Road*, Viking, 1957. $3,700.

Mailer's *The Naked and the Dead*, Rinehart, 1955: $1,000.

Longfellow's *Evangeline*, in a special presentation edition limited to 50 copies, 1848. $4,500.

Collins' *The Moonstone*, Harper and Brothers, 1868. $300.

Thoreau's *Walden*, Ticknor and Fields, 1854. $7,500.

Burroughs' *Naked Lunch*, Olympia, 1959. $1,000. (First Mailer, then Kerouac, now Burroughs. That Castelli woman who had balked at *Gone with the Wind* must've got more radical in her old age.)

Banks's *The Wasp Factory*, Macmillan, 1984: $125. (Another surprise. Mamoulian wouldn't have pegged Emily as a Banks reader. Those depths he had sensed in her yesterday must conceal some strange currents.)

Mamoulian spotted a book whose unique spine instantly and improbably evoked a childhood memory. Barrie's *Peter Pan*. He took the book in hand. It was the first U.S. edition, Scribner's, 1906, worth over nine hundred dollars. But save for its superior condition, it was also identical to the beat-up copy Mamoulian had read and re-read as a child. His mother had inherited it from her mother, and Mamoulian had discovered it by himself on the family shelves. Until this very moment, Mamoulian hadn't realized he had been handling the first edition as a kid—

He had been a bright 10-year-old, a voracious reader, eager to explore the world through books. The Disney *Peter Pan* had just been released, and Mamoulian had gotten "hooked" on the Edwardian fantasy. Falling into the novel had proved an even more rewarding experience, offering a crisp and thrilling mental movie Disney could never bring to the screen.

Jesus, where had that retarded bookish kid disappeared to? Swamped somewhere in Mamoulian's ponderous flesh, he supposed. When was the last time he had actually *read* a book?

Mamoulian shook his head as if to dislodge invisible cobwebs. The motion, combined with his lack of sleep and food, made him dizzy. Oddly, the echo of Emily's fingertips straying across the bindings and a whiff of her lavender scent seemed suddenly to fill the room. On a whim, his heart racing unaccountably, Mamoulian opened the novel to its first page and began to read.

All children, except one, grow up. They soon know that they will grow up, and the way Wendy knew was this. One day when she was two years old she was playing in a garden, and she plucked another flower, and ran with it to her mother. I suppose she must have looked rather delightful, for Mrs. Darling put her hand to her heart and cried, "Oh, why can't you remain like this forever!" That was all that passed between them on the subject, but henceforth Wendy knew that she must grow up. You always know after you are two. Two is the beginning of the end.

And that was the last Mamoulian knew of the common world until he came to himself hours later behind the wheel of his van, barreling down the highway at 10 miles over the speed limit, a sign informing him that he was already halfway home.

The pile of unopened orders on Mamoulian's desk reared higher each day since his return, but he let them sit untended. The blank screen of his new computer monitor was filmed with dust. The shelves of his shop needed dusting as well, but he couldn't summon up the energy. He sat all day behind his desk, trying to fathom what had happened to him in Newbery. He might have perpetuated such a daily stasis forever had not his brother walked in unannounced one afternoon, and dropped a pile of cash on the desk.

Mamoulian bestirred himself. "What's this?"

Lev beamed, but Mamoulian refused to mirror the expression. "Part of the money I owe you."

"You're really working again?"

"You bet. And me and Roberta are getting along really good too."

Mamoulian poked at the money disinterestedly. "Well, that's a first. Good for you—I guess."

Lev frowned. "Shit, Alex. Are you actually disappointed that I didn't screw up again?"

"No, no, I'm glad you got back on your feet. It's just—listen, when you were hitting the bottle hard, did you ever blank out? Maybe go through a few hours you couldn't remember afterward?"

"Of course. All the real alkies experience that. Why do you ask?"

"Something like that happened to me recently. And it scared the fuck out of me."

"Were you drinking?"

"No. That's the scariest part. I was stone-cold sober, and in the middle of the best experience of my professional life."

"Sounds like overwork to me. I've heard about that happening to Type-A guys. Some stockbroker on the edge walks out of his office and wakes up in Peoria a week later. You work too hard, Alex. You should think about taking a vacation. Come with me and Roberta and Avram next time we go to the shore. You can bring a friend if you want."

Mamoulian snorted. "Yeah, sure. Me and Mrs. Palm."

Turning to leave, Lev said, "Think about it, Alex. I'll be back next month with the rest of your loan."

After the door had closed behind his brother, Mamoulian took out his prized rare Ballard from its cabinet. He turned it this way and that, but the book roused no feelings of pride or pleasure in him. He propped it up by the keyboard as a reminder. Next time Avram stopped in, he would have the boy show him how to post sale entries to his Web site, using the Ballard as the first instance. Sell the damned chimera and forget about it, let the scholars debate its existence.

The next thing Mamoulian did was to secure his checkbook and, after consulting his records for the relevant name and address, write out a thousand-dollar check to the Widow Hollis. On the memo line he wrote *Sold those magazines for more than I planned.* He sealed

Continued on page 95

BY DAVE SMEDS

Conceiving KINGS

Every lineage has a starting point. Watch as two of the most famous are begun.

S

heedless of trampled pansies. "Perrine!" she called again. No answer.

ng her for the sake of mischief.

He was not that sort of son.

She carefully examined the verge there. Footprints

"Pertto!" she called again. No answer.

The tightness inside rooted more deeply, seizing her belly in an echo of the pangs she had suffered birthing the boy, 13 summers gone. He could not, would not, be worrying her for the sake of mischief. He was not that sort of son.

The Sun puddled behind the treetops to the west. Pertto should have long since been home, measuring out the dyer's-weed she had sent him out to find, helping determine how much more they would need to color her most recent batch of cloth. By nature he would be entreating his Aunt Linna for a taste of the coney stew she was preparing for supper. He was never late for meals.

Trees enveloped her as the tilled area gave way to native forest. While her eyes adjusted to shadow, she carefully examined the verge.

There. Footprints.

That much was as it should have been. The tracks were still plain in the dust, obscured only by the recent passage of a stoat on its way to the brook. A few of the impressions revealed the dimple in his left heel, what the clan healer had called the Moon's kiss because its crescent shape mirrored that visible in the sky the night Pertto—only five years old then—had gashed the foot falling from a tree.

Verra worked her way deeper beneath the boughs. Her son had come along the edge of the flax, taking the long way around in respect of the crop, and had turned in by the deer trail that led to the patch of greenweed that would have been his prime destination.

The signs led on without detour to the nearest cluster of the shrubs. Disrupted, fragrant soil revealed where he must have yanked plants loose to stuff into his sack.

Her breath caught. The sack itself lay ahead beside the trail, unlaced, contents scattered. The loam was scarred by the divots and fantails of abrupt struggle.

Ambush.

Twilight muddied the details as Verra hurried on, but she saw enough to confirm the worst. Footprints made by large men in shoes led away from the patch of greenweed, the traces overlaid by a double channel of disturbed soil, such as would be made by a pair of dragging heels. On the far side of the nearest knoll, the signs were replaced by the hoofprints of burdened horses, one set pressed noticeably deeper than the others.

In Verra's small hamlet and the adjacent farms, only the headman was rich enough to own a horse. He had only one. It was a big-footed beast that pulled a plough willingly enough, but would not tolerate a rider.

Strangers had kidnapped her child.

As suspicion became certainty, her anguish nearly seized control of her. Hurrying 20 paces to the brook, she flung water on her face. Three, four, five scoopings. The bracing splashes quelled the feverishness, drove the beeswax softness from her knees and from her spine.

With a clarity that rivaled the droplets trickling off her chin, she banished the temptation to run back to her hut to enlist the aid of her sister and nieces. Her home was in the wrong direction. She had to run onward, in the wake of the kidnappers. Help was needed, but it had to be found along the way, where it might be near enough to give Pertto a chance to be rescued.

She picked herself up and raced into the forest.

THE FARMER GRABBED HIS SPLITTING AXE AS VERRA BURST FROM THE darkness beyond his woodpile. He had the tool raised over his head by the time he recognized her.

"Goddess preserve me, Weaver," he cried, rubbing his instep where, in his haste, he had dropped the log he had been raising to the chopping block. "You nearly turned the rest of my beard gray."

"My apologies, Vollo," she blurted between inward scoops of air. "Riders have stolen my son."

It soothed her heart that he did not hesitate, did not question her assessment. Surely she must look the part of a madwoman—her face and arms bleeding from her dash through the night-shrouded woods, her braid unraveled, sweat darkening her blouse from neck to waist. She and Vollo saw one another at most twice per year, and those brief exchanges at market fairs when he and his wife stopped by her racks to gossip or to purchase cloth from her. He ran immediately to his shack and reappeared with his three eldest sons, axes and clubs in hand.

"Be they Romans?" the farmer asked.

"I don't know." Verra replied, voice steadier now that she had her breath back. She explained all that she had seen. "I did not try to follow their trail in the poor light. I came straight here."

"Haste was fitting," Vollo agreed. He ran a hand through the thinning hair atop his head. "If the riders continued this way, they'll be seeking the Roman road. It's but a league that way." He waved west toward the narrow cart path that served his holdings. Behind him, a newly risen gibbous Moon tempered the darkness. To the weak-willed, the shadows might have seemed sharper and more ominous, but to Verra, it meant the Goddess's light was with her guiding her toward her child.

Vollo sent one of his boys north to reconnoiter the woods should the riders be avoiding the trails. Another son scampered away southward. The eldest, brawniest of his offspring ran ahead down the cart track, soon disappearing into the gloom on the way to the next neighbor's cottage.

Verra knew that after her long run she couldn't keep up with a healthy youth with fresh legs, but she pushed on so fervently that Vollo was soon wheezing and staggering to keep pace.

"All those years at the loom haven't worn you down," the farmer puffed. "Rane was always going on about his robust wife. I see he did not lie."

"Rane never lied," Verra replied. As far as husbands went, hers had been all she could have wished for. Now the one thing she had left of him had been taken.

Her companion appeared too winded to say more. Better that way. "I will not think less of you if you drop back," she said.

"Nay. Braddo's holding is just over this rise. I can keep up."

True to Vollo's word, the cottage, hog pens, and grain fields soon appeared in the moonglow. A watchfire had been lit in the summer cooking hearth near the pond. Folk were gathering there.

Vollo kept up, but only just barely. Verra rushed straight to Braddo, another customer of her wares at festivals, even less known to her than Vollo, but just as quick to greet her with seriousness and belief. They were all Iceni. They protected their own.

"My kinsmen are already inspecting the Roman road," he said, pointing west. "The route passes along the edge of my land. In the meantime, you may want to hear what my youngest boy has to say."

With a curt wave from his father, the child, a gangly lad of eight or nine, timidly emerged from the shelter of his female relatives. Verra squatted, making her height less than his, and ultimately he ventured within arm's reach.

"What is it?" Verra asked, trying to sound calm but unable to eliminate the warble from her voice.

"This morning, I saw three men on horses turn off of the Roman road and ride east."

Verra leaned in. "Romans?"

"No. Not legionnaires. Their clothes looked like ours."

"But they were not Iceni?"

"No. The tattoos were not like ours." The boy gestured at the tribal decorations along his father's arms.

"Were you not alarmed? Did you not tell your parents?"

"I

"He did not," his mother interrupted sharply. "He was sampling honey from a hive on the far side of the stream, instead of fetching rocks to expand the hog pen. He did not want to reveal his transgression."

"He ought to be punished," his father said. The boy paled. "Yet I think I will spare him. His testimony brings us closer to knowing whose clan must pay the blood debt, if such payment becomes necessary."

A passionate murmur of agreement traveled from Braddo's wife to Vollo to Braddo's aged grandsire Vollo tested the edge of his axe

Verra patted the child's hand "It took courage to speak up tonight I thank you"

The boy smiled, but soon retreated from the firelight, no doubt relieved at the preoccupation of the adults By the time Verra glanced his way again, he was out of sight All those assembled turned to greet Braddo s nephew, returning from scouting the road.

"We found hoofprints and droppings laid down early in the day," the youth reported. "No sign that riders have used the road since then " He waved his burned-out torch back and forth, mimicking a search of the ground.

"They may very well be hiding in a thicket until dawn," Vollo suggested

"It seems likely they will return to the road at some point. Our best hope is to be in ambush until they appear " Braddo said

The men immersed themselves in planning, assigning some of their number to gather further help, others to scout, and a group to lie in wait. Verra nodded her acquiescence, taking comfort in the energetic response to her crisis. Braddo's wife brought her bread, wine, and cheese, and insisted that she eat

A consensus was reached The men gathered weapons and small quantities of provisions, and departed. Braddo's eldest was assigned to alert the Roman garrison The locals put little trust in the legionnaires—the crones and graybeards of their families had, in their childhoods, personally witnessed the defeat of their great queen by Suetonius Paulinus—but the foreigners did enforce the laws from time to time, at least on those occasions when they were not themselves guilty of the crimes. Regrettably, it would take the youth the rest of the night and half the day to reach the outpost

Braddo, one of the most capable warriors, went with the ambushers Verra was soon left with the women and children of the household, whom Vollo had stayed to guard

"Now, we wait," Vollo said

Already Verra was shifting restlessly She rose from the stump where she had sat to eat, setting down her bread half eaten Until now, the search had consumed her, kept her mind partially clear of the images of what might be happening to her child Now all manner of unwelcome thoughts rose up, including one which, she realized with a start, she should have considered earlier

"Suppose the abductors are not going to the road at all What other sites lie near to which they might take him?"

The shadows beneath Vollo's brows deepened. "Between your land and the road? Save for my holding and Braddo s, there is naught but forest and swamp

"There is the old barrow," she said in a whisper

Vollo sucked in air sharply "No one goes to the barrow."

"All the more reason to fear Pertto was taken there "

"It is not the sort of refuge any group of men would select Certainly it is no place to go near at night Bury this notion, Weaver It will only gnaw at your heart "

The food Verra had just eaten became a cobblestone in her middle. The notion would not go away

"If the men did take Pertto there, they didn't want him for a slave," she said urgently "Their designs are more horrid than that. We have to find him *now*! He will not survive the night "

Vollo turned, his grimace revealed by the embers of the outdoor hearth "No one has ever entered the barrow and come away unblighted."

"But Vollo "

"I will not go there with you, Weaver," persisted the old farmer "Nor will I allow any of the women and younglings here to be tainted by such a visit. If you insist, if the abductors do not appear along the Roman road in the morning, a party of us will go and survey the barrow and learn what we can At *midday*, and from a distance."

Verra stepped back, shocked. Her friend, who had proven so true these past few hours, had transformed himself "I must go, if not with you, then alone "

Vollo sighed. "I see that you must Mark me as a coward if you will I have fought battles, and I have seen some of the wonders of the old realm. I will face either one again if need be. Not this The barrow reaches to a part of Other-world better sundered from us forever. You do not remember my uncle. You are too young ..."

"No. I did not know your uncle "

"He survived the crush of Boudicca's army. Thought himself blessed with fortune On a dare, he visited the barrow He returned to us changed. Two seasons later, he took his own life When he died, my father wept not with despair, but with relief. It is best you think of your boy as already dead, and concern yourself with marking those who must pay our people the blood debt "

Verra saw that she could no more persuade him than haul one of Braddo's full-grown sows up an oak tree, greased. Braddo's wife, who had listened to it all, avoided her gaze, holding tightly to one of her half-grown daughters

No time. No time Verra's legs—and the stamina that Vollo had praised earlier in the night—were Pertto's last pillars of hope She sprinted eastward, seeking a path little used for generations

Bones littered the floor. Freshly gnawed, streaked with lingering blood, marrow still seeping.

THE MOON RODE HIGHER AND HIGHER IN THE SKY, CLEANING AWAY some of the sylvan dimness along her route. Not enough. Her haste still led her to stumble over the serpentine ankles of oak trees. Twice her footing gave way as she stepped on rodent burrows. She rose, spitting grit, limping, and forged onward until her breath came in wheezes and her hair was limp with sweat.

She moaned when the stars began to wink out, and the blackness of the void condensed into the deep violet of the world's roof. Birds stirred, their twitters heralding the new day A diffused, dew-heavy haziness flowed into the gaps between the trees

Suddenly a peculiar flash cut through the woods, a glimpse of bluish, eldritch light that vanished as soon as it came, as if a door flap had been raised and immediately dropped

Verra choked down the scream that threatened to sprout from her throat

Until then, despite weariness, she had managed a trace of speed Now it was all she could do to raise her heels off the carpet of dead leaves and twigs She crept on in blind determination, dreading what she would find

A misty dawn absent of Sun had claimed the landscape by the time she emerged into the clearing around a small marsh and found herself in front of a low cairn of stone The rock was not hewn The lichen and scrub of thousands of years cloaked it, yet the pile still wore the aura of having been placed there by sentient design How slabs so large could have been transported was beyond Verra's knowledge There were no outcroppings of its type anywhere else in the region's expanses of fen and woodland

A low opening yawned at its base, seemingly no more than a fox hollow, and barely broad enough to allow a human to enter Approaching cautiously, Verra noted piles of horse dung and an

array of hoofprints and footprints, all fresh. The incoming trail showed that one horse was heavily burdened, as she had seen in the spoor near her flax fields the previous evening. The departing trail, heading around the far side of the marsh, indicated all three mounts now carried normal loads.

The aroma of horse still clung to the air. The shrews and toads in the leaf litter were as yet motionless and silent, in the way of wild creatures that have been recently intruded upon.

She gave no thought to pursuit. Much as it chafed her to let the perpetrators go, she had not come for them. She had come for Pertto.

Body trembling, she lowered herself to her hands and knees and inched into the low cave. The spider webs were broken by recent passage, the dirt scarred by dragging knees, feet, and burdens.

Once she was fully into the passageway, but before her eyes could fully adjust, a wave of chill air rolled over her. Light leaped at her from every direction.

As before, the flash lasted no longer than a beat of her heart. Blinking, teary-eyed, she glanced back the way she had come. The cleaning and woods at first appeared not to have changed, but something was eerily wrong. Finally she perceived what it was. No dewdrops fell from high places to low, no branches swayed in the wind, no birds fluttered. The view was an imprisoned moment of time, as lifeless as a carving.

Licking dry lips, trying not to let her breathing turn to panting, Verra crawled onward, descending. The walls, strangely, seeped only a little moisture, despite the proximity of the marsh. Within a few bodylengths the passageway expanded. She brushed a pair of long objects. More by touch than sight, she identified them as unburned torches made of tightly bound wicker.

She drew out her tinder pouch and flint and lit a flame. In another moment, she succeeded in igniting one of the bundles, which appeared to have been steeped in oil. Acrid smoke swept over her, but when it rose away from her face, she could see a large chamber of the type of stone that formed the above-ground portions of the barrow.

"Ah! Oh, no!" she cried, and fell to her knees, ripping her skirt, bruising her kneecaps.

Bones littered the floor. Freshly gnawed, streaked with lingering blood, marrow still seeping. A few gory shreds of cloth—fabric she had woven—clung to the grisly remains.

How long she remained there, tears blinding her and convulsive sobs racking her body, she didn't know. Eventually she grew aware that something else shared the cavern.

She picked up the torch she had dropped. The flame revived, casting at the dimness with lively strokes of orange and yellow, enough to delineate the mica and fungi of the walls, but for some reason, insufficient to reveal the .. being ... directly in front of her. 10 paces away.

She didn't wish to speak to it. She wanted only to get away. It was as if someone else were using her lips and tongue as she asked, with a forcefulness that surprised her, "What are you?"

"Not even I know the answer to that," the thing replied. Its voice settled on her ears from all directions. "Those who come to this place usually know what form they wish me to take."

"Then take the form you showed to the men who left moments ago, the ones who brought my baby to die in this foul place."

"As you wish." The creature's form coalesced. It became large, reptilian. Great, leathery, folded wings jutted up behind its head. Its mouth was as wide as Verra was tall. The shortest of its teeth could have skewered her head from crown to mandible. Its skin phosphoresced from pus-yellow to maggot-white, as if the creature had lived all its life in this subterranean haunt.

A dry bubble of air caught in Verra's throat.

"You are impressed? *They* were. They wanted to petition the guardian of the soul of the White Isle. In this form, I hold within my claws all the strands of destiny that affect this land. Naught has happened, or will happen, within its shores that I have not seen, that I cannot touch."

"You control fate?"

"Control is not my function. It is one thing to have power. It is another to use it."

I see."

The dragon gestured at its form. "I have granted your request to see me thus. What will you do for me?" It leaned closer, inundating her with the earthly aroma of fens, low hills, chalk cliffs—all the scents of Britain at once. It licked its stained, fissured teeth. "You might be tasty."

"I might be, but you are not hungry," she said, again wondering at her bold tone. The longer she remained in the barrow, the more she recalled all the anger she had ever felt—the unfairness of her spouse's untimely death, the disdain with which the legionnaires regarded her tribe, the unceasing toil of her daily life. Always strong-willed, she was hardening beyond any former capacity.

"True, I have feasted," the entity admitted. "Perhaps I will let you leave this grotto alive, if you prove an entertaining visitor."

"What occurred here this night? Who were those men, and why did they offer you my son?"

"In olden times, your family ruled the Iceni?" the dragon asked.

She nodded. "Boudicca was my mother's aunt."

"Your son's blood was necessary to the enchantment my supplicants asked for. It was the ichor of chieftains, full of youth's vigor, within a vessel untouched by either battle or carnal indulgences. In centuries to come, your clan might have produced another leader of the caliber of your aunt. Now, that potential rests with another line."

"They wanted a queen, and you gave them one?"

"A king," the dragon said. Its scaly lips twitched, as if it were suppressing laughter. "Your son's death catalyzed magic that allowed me to tweak the strands of fate. In three or four hundred years—an eye-blink—after the Romans have retreated from this island, a man bearing the standard of the white dragon will be high king of all the Celts."

"This at the price of murder."

"Great things come with a price. I am bound by my nature to do what I can to grant the desires of those willing to offer the appropriate tribute. Given such reward, I might even be persuaded to help *you*."

"Undo the spell," she demanded. "Let no one benefit from my son's death. That is the help I desire."

The apparition's smile became a chuckle. "Weaver, you should know that once the garment is woven, the skein cannot be pulled out. I told you I can touch all the strands of destiny. It takes power beyond mine to *alter* what I touch. My recent visitors gave me what was necessary to accomplish such an act, but now that corner of the tapestry is done."

Verra's chin fell. Her shoulders sagged. "Then, I am in truth too late. Even if my people find the abductors and I take their lives myself, my son's death will have served them. I cannot take my vengeance in the manner that would grieve them most."

She dragged herself to her feet, dabbing her bloody kneecaps with the hem of her torn skirt. She turned toward the exit, but did not step that way. She was unsure she would be allowed to go. If not—if the beast took her life—so be it.

"Good widow," the dragon said with the geniality of a coconspirator, "a high king there will be. The crowning is foreordained. But the pact did not address the question of that high king's progeny. Across the history of this isle, dynasties have not always endured the transition from founder to heir. Inasmuch as you have lost a son ..."

Verra raised her face and locked gazes with the dragon. "What bribe will it take to gain your cooperation? Have I the means to tempt you?"

"That depends on what you are willing to do. But I am sure, goaded as you have been, that you will find a means. May I suggest possibilities?"

Verra knelt down again to listen, and she listened very, very well. ❧

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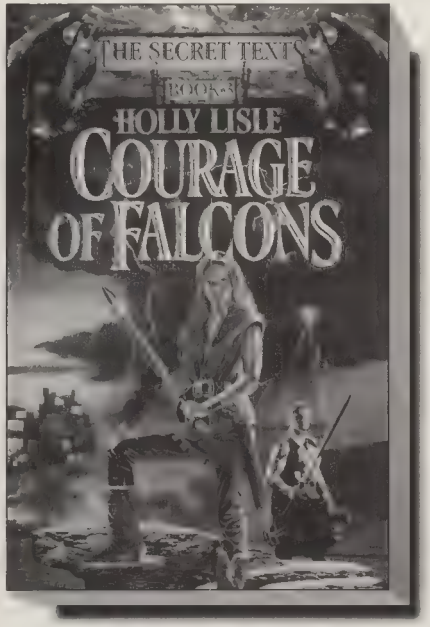

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The Golem

By Naomi Kritzer

Illustrated by Wen Hsiao

A gust of wind blew through the cemetery, and the golem felt the skin on her body rise into gooseflesh. Alena winced at the sight. Stepping around Hanna, she took off her coat. "Here," she said, holding it out.

The golem took the coat and stared at Alena, unsure what she was supposed to do with it.

"You're supposed to put it *on*," Alena said, slipping it around the golem's shoulders. "If we run into the police, we'll be in enough trouble with Hanna being out after curfew, never mind walking around with a naked woman."

The golem put the coat on and buttoned it. "Thank you," she said. Hanna started a little at the sound of the golem's voice.

Alena glanced at Hanna. "You could have suggested that I bring clothes for the golem."

Hanna blinked. "It's not in any of the stories."

Alena snorted and shook her head. "Weren't you the one who complained that all the stories were written by men?" She studied the golem again. "There's something familiar about your face," she said.

"Look in a mirror," Hanna said. "She could be your sister."

Alena looked again, and recoiled slightly. "Did you do that on purpose?"

"No," Hanna said. "I was working so quickly, she's lucky she has a nose."

There was a rustle somewhere in the darkness behind them, and Alena glanced over her shoulder. "Do we need to have this conversation in the cemetery?" she asked.

Hanna turned to her, meeting her gaze without flinching. "For the same purpose as all the golems: to protect the Jews of Prague."

The golem felt the impossibility of the request sweep over her like rising floodwater. The machinery of death was already in motion around her. The Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia was run by Reinhard Heydrich, the man who had built Dachau and enshrined the words *Arbeit Macht Frei* (work will set you free) over the gates. He had already begun deporting the Czech Jews to Terezín, the deportations would continue, taking 1,200 Jews each week until only a handful—the spouses or children of gentiles—remained. From Terezín, nearly all would ultimately be taken to Auschwitz or Treblinka to die.

The golem's voice was flat when she answered. "No one can protect the Jews of Prague." Hanna's eyes showed disbelief, so the golem continued. "Some will survive, but most will die. Terezín is just the pen outside the slaughterhouse."

"There must be something that can be done," Alena whispered. She had selected a dress from the pile; now it slipped from her hands.

The golem had opened her mouth to tell her no, there was nothing, but as the dress fluttered to the floor she hesitated. "There are things that can be done. Perhaps they will even do a little good. But there is nothing I can do to protect *all* the Jews of Prague, or even most. Or even many."

Four hundred years ago, Rabbi Löw had created the golem to protect the Jews against pogroms. Pogroms, in Prague and elsewhere, were typically fueled by blood libel—the story that the Jews mur-

Hanna had seven months to live—she would die with Alena.

"No one will come here for one hour, one minute, and twenty-one seconds," the golem said.

"Maybe," Alena said. Her tone was doubtful. "But it's cold out here." She turned brusquely and strode toward the cemetery gate.

The gate was locked, of course; it was well after closing hours. Alena and Hanna had scrambled over the fence to get in, and they scrambled over it to get out. The golem helped them as well as she could; her previous bodies had been better suited to this sort of thing. Always before, she had possessed strength without knowledge; this time, she had knowledge, and little else. So she told them what she could—that they could take their time.

Hanna and Alena shared an apartment on Dlouhá street. They lived at the edge of Josefov, the old Jewish ghetto, in one of the oldest parts of Prague. Alena led the way up the stairs to the apartment, locking the door behind them quickly once they were inside. The front room was immaculate, without so much as an old newspaper on the floor. The two women actually lived in the back bedroom and the kitchen; the front room, the golem knew instantly, was for others to see.

"We tell people that Hanna is my maid," Alena said, with a gesture toward the room. "Jews aren't supposed to share apartments with gentiles, unless they're married to one."

The back room was where all the clutter was—all of Hanna's possessions, and most of Alena's. Suitcases were stacked in the corner; one had burst open, spilling books onto the floor. An antique copy of the Talmud had been placed carefully on top of the stack, a copy of Freud's *The Future of an Illusion* lay beside a copy of Martin Buber's *I and Thou*. Tucked half under the bottom suitcase was a copy of *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*, by Gertrude Stein. There was another stack of books in the corner, all in Hebrew—the lore of the golem. The windows were covered with dark, heavy curtains.

Hanna checked the curtains as Alena lit the lamp, to be certain that they still covered the windows securely. Then Hanna hung up her coat and sat down. Alena rummaged through a heap of clothing draped over a chair, looking for a dress suitable for the golem.

The golem took off Alena's coat and hung it up beside Hanna's. "You called me, and I woke," she said. "For what purpose have you created me?"

dered gentile children to make unleavened bread with their blood. When a young Christian woman disappeared, the hideous stories had surfaced like scum on a pond. Rabbi Löw had sent the golem out to look, the golem had hunted through the night, and found the girl alive, hidden away in a cellar. The golem had broken down the door and brought the girl to the Town Square for all to see. And so the Jews had been saved.

Unfortunately, Rabbi Löw had destroyed his creation shortly afterward. But at least that miracle had been relatively easy to accomplish.

Hanna picked up Alena's dress from where it had fallen. "Put this on," she said. "Even if you can't save us, there's plenty of work you can do."

The golem pulled the dress over her head and began to fasten the buttons.

"She needs a name," Hanna said. "We're going to have to introduce her to other people."

Alena looked her over. "We'll tell them she's my cousin, Margit."

"Doesn't Margit live in England?"

"Canada," Alena said. "But nobody in Prague knows that."

"Do you think Pavlík can arrange false papers for her?" Hanna asked.

"Papers won't be necessary," the golem said, straightening the skirt of the dress. "I will not be asked for them."

Hanna and Alena exchanged looks.

"Are you *sure*?" Alena asked.

"The police will pass by on the street outside in nine minutes and forty-three seconds," the golem said. "Watch, if you don't believe me."

Alena checked her watch and went to the front room to wait. Ten minutes later, she returned, raised one eyebrow, and nodded once.

"I guess she may be useful, after all," Hanna said.

Alena sent the golem to sleep on the couch in the unused living room. The golem did not need sleep, but lay down obediently and closed her eyes for the duration of the night. Very early, she heard footsteps and a faint, faint male voice, speaking Czech. She rose and went into the back bedroom. The voice was coming from the kitchen, she realized after a moment that it was a radio, turned down so as to be almost inaudible. "This is Radio Free Prague," the voice said.

Alena sat at the kitchen table, transcribing the radio broadcast

in shorthand. Hanna cooked breakfast, making enough noise to cover the sound of the radio for any ears but the golem's. Alena nodded a greeting as the golem came in, then bent her head over her notes again.

The broadcast lasted for 45 minutes, then switched over to a different language. Hanna gave Alena a bowl of porridge, and Alena pushed the paper aside with a sigh, picking up her spoon. Hanna sat down, took out a separate piece of paper, and quickly transcribed the shorthand into a neat, readable script.

Alena looked up from her porridge to study the golem. "Do you eat?"

The golem shrugged. "I can eat, but I don't have to."

"Are you hungry?"

"No."

Alena still hesitated, and Hanna looked up from the transcript. "Don't be silly," Hanna said. "She doesn't need anything, so why waste the rations?"

Alena shrugged and went back to eating. A few minutes later, Hanna finished the transcription. She blew on the ink to dry it, then folded the letter, put it in an envelope, sealed the envelope, and addressed it as if it were an ordinary letter. Then she held it out to the golem. "Take this to Vltavská 16. Do you know where that is?"

"Yes."

"Take this there and put it into the mail slot. If anybody asks your name, say that you're Margit Nebesky. Come back here when you're done."

"She should take my papers," Alena said. "My photo's not that good. She could pass as me, easily."

"I won't need them," the golem said.

"Take them anyway," Alena said. "I'll stay here until you get back." Alena handed the golem her purse, then looked at her again and laughed. "Hanna, were you really going to send her out like that? Barefoot, without a hat?"

Hanna looked at the golem and blushed. "Sorry," she said.

Alena took out a hat and pair of shoes, as well as her winter coat, and the golem put them on. Everything fit. "We'll have to get another coat somewhere," Alena said. "Even if she can get by without papers, sending her out with no coat in December seems a bit cruel, and I don't want to be stuck in the apartment."

"At least that should be easier than false papers," Hanna said. She tucked the envelope into Alena's purse and handed it back to the golem. "Do you have any questions?"

"No."

"Then get going."

The golem headed out. Hanna called after her, "If you see anything *helpful* you could do while you're out—do it."

The December sky was as gray as cement; it was not raining or snowing as the golem left the apartment, but it would start soon. Nobody glanced twice at the golem, and she strode quickly through the streets toward her destination.

Vltavská 16 was on the other side of the Vltava River. It would have been fastest to take the streetcar, but Hanna had not specifically *told* the golem that she *had* to take the fastest route. Despite the cold, the golem was in no particular hurry to return to the apartment. Besides, Prague had changed a lot since her last visit; she wanted to see the city.

From the house on Dlouhá street, she passed through the Old Town Square. It was no longer the commercial center of the city, but there were plenty of people here, and plenty of commerce. A few police officers swaggered through the crowd, but she avoided any who might have asked to see her papers. They had finished Tyn Church, she noticed, also, they had put up a huge statue of Jan Hus. It was the biggest thing on the square.

Continuing toward the Vltava, she passed the National Theatre, that was new. It was huge and boxy and ornate, with a silvery roof and carvings along the sides. She skipped that bridge and continued along the river to the bridge that would take her directly to the Smíchov district.

Vltavská 16 was a small house, new since her last visit, but not that new. The Nazi informant who lived a few doors down would be coming out to water her plants in a minute, so the golem slipped the transcript through the mail drop quickly and was on her way before the woman came out. The Resistance member who lived at Vltavská 16 had a printing press, by evening, handbills with the transcript would be passed hand to hand in the markets and squares of Prague.

The golem decided to cross at the Charles Bridge on the way back. The Charles Bridge was old even when she'd last lived in Prague, although it had a different name then. The bridge had statues now, saints and angels looming over the people as they crossed. She was passing the Church of Saint Nicholas, most of the way there, when she saw a patch of yellow through the jostling crowd. A Jewish family, struggling with suitcases and two small children. The golem made her way toward them. Hanna had told her to help, if she could.

The woman had set down her suitcase, trying to rebalance the child on her hip, when the golem reached them. They were already tired, she could see, and ashamed to be seen struggling on foot through Prague like this. The golem didn't really want to know who they were or what fate awaited them, but the knowledge was there as soon as it occurred to her to wonder. Shayna and Mandel Fienbaum, and their children—Selig, age three, and Reise, age six months. Shayna and Reise would die at Terezin during one of the typhoid outbreaks. Mandel and Selig would live to be murdered at Treblinka, in 18 months.

"Excuse me," the golem said. "You look a bit overwhelmed, with the children and the suitcases. May I carry something for you?"

They looked nervous when she first approached, but Shayna's face broke quickly into sweet relief. "Oh, thank you," she said. "Yes, please, if you'd be so kind. Thank you."

Mandel would not let the golem take both suitcases, but she lifted one easily, freeing the woman to carry just the child. "We're going to the Trade Fair grounds," Shayna said.

The golem nodded. The Trade Fair grounds was where the Jews of Prague would be assembled, one thousand at a time. Like the others, Mandel and Shayna would be stripped of their documents and any items of value, then deported to Terezin in the dark hours of night.

Shayna introduced herself and her husband and children, the golem introduced herself as Margit. "You're so kind to help us," Shayna said, in a tone that asked *why* any Czech woman would help Jews.

"It's nothing," the golem said.

"Look in a mirror," Hanna said. "She could be your sister."

The Trade Fair grounds were in Holesovice, north and east along the curve of the Vltava. In coming weeks, the Jewish teenagers of Prague would organize to assist families like this one, oiling the machinery that would ultimately devour them. Not that they knew that, of course, all they knew was that they were helping people who needed help, carrying bags for people who would have to struggle alone across Prague in the cold.

The golem knew, of course. She considered this, as she carried the suitcase, but it seemed to her that to tell this family their fate would only increase their suffering—if they believed her. As she had told Hanna, there was very little that could be done, she could carry their suitcases, and ease their suffering, but she couldn't save them.

"Here we are," Mandel said as they reached the edge of the Trade Fair grounds. "Thank you so much for your help."

"It was nothing," the golem said, and turned to go.

"Wait," Shayna said. "I want to give you something."

"I don't need any payment," the golem said.

"Not payment," Shayna said. "Just a gift." She opened one of the bags and drew out a small silver case, which she pressed into the

golem's hand. "Just to say thank you."

The golem closed her hand over the gift and watched as the family went to join the other families queuing in a jostling mass. When they were gone, she opened her hand and looked. Shayna had given her a silver cigarette case, with five cigarettes inside, and a book of matches. Looking more closely, the golem realized that a pearl had been hidden inside the cigarette case, as well. It was a single perfect pearl, set into a pendant, with a thin gold chain. She wondered if Shayna had meant to give her the pearl, or just the cigarettes, but it hardly mattered—in a few hours, the rest of the family's valuables would be confiscated by the Nazis, even the gold jewelry that they had so carefully sewn into the lining of their coats. Better the golem have the pearl than the Nazis.

The golem touched the pearl, then smiled and closed the cigarette case with a click, slipping it into the pocket of her dress. The cigarettes might also be useful, and Hanna would not think to ask whether the golem had received any gifts.

When the golem reached the apartment, she could hear someone weeping. She slipped in quietly, stepped out of her shoes, and crossed the floor to listen at the door. It was Hanna who was weeping, and for a chill moment the golem thought she had decided to destroy her. But she was crying for a friend—a young man she'd known, Jewish, shot for failure to report for deportation to Terezin. Alena sat beside Hanna at the kitchen table, one arm around Hanna's waist.

After a long time, Hanna raised her head. "What are we going to do if I get called for deportation?" she whispered through her tears.

Alena pulled a handkerchief out of her pocket. "Why don't you ever have a handkerchief in your own pocket, Hanna? Blow your nose."

Hanna wiped her nose and her eyes. "You didn't answer my question."

Alena took the handkerchief back. "You're not going anywhere. I can't go," she said. "I'll hide you if it comes to that."

"They'll look here."

"We'll hide you with a member of the Resistance, then. I have connections."

"But if they find me—"

"If I have to, I'll get false papers that say I'm Jewish—those should be easy enough to come by—and go with you."

Hanna laughed through her tears. "Your Resistance friends would think you were crazy."

"I don't care," Alena said. "We'll do what we have to do. For now—" She leaned her forehead against Hanna's shoulder. "Don't worry yourself."

It was ironic, the golem thought, that in the end it would be Alena who put Hanna in danger, rather than the other way around. Hanna would probably have died regardless, but there was no way to know. The golem retraced her steps through the parlor, slipped her shoes back on, and banged the door shut as if she'd just come in.

The women's voices stopped. "Who is it?" Alena called.

"It's me—Margit," the golem said.

Alena threw open the door to the back rooms, a welcoming smile on her face. "How did it go?"

"Fine." The golem followed Alena back into the kitchen. Hanna hastily wiped her nose again, this time on her sleeve, and straightened up. "I delivered the letter where you told me," the golem said to her.

"Did anyone ask for your papers?" Alena asked.

"No."

"You can go out without them tomorrow, then. But I'm going to try to get a false set for you, just in case."

In the meantime, Alena had bartered with someone in her building for an extra coat, it was shabby but reasonably warm, and it fit.

"There's something else I'd like to know," Hanna said. "What happens if you get arrested?"

The golem knew what she was asking. The golem was made of clay, brought to life with faith and magic. Hanna could destroy the golem with a quick gesture across the golem's forehead, changing the word *emet*—truth—to *met*—death. But if she were shot—could a bullet stop a heart of clay?

"Bullets will not stop me," the golem said. "But a hot enough fire can consume even clay."

Hanna nodded.

"However, I cannot be coerced to reveal your secrets," the golem said. Her clay body could feel pain, but she was as indifferent to pain as she was to cold.

Alena raised an eyebrow. "That's useful to know."

"What did you do today after you delivered the letter?" Hanna asked.

"I helped a Jewish family that was walking to the Trade Fair grounds," the golem said.

Hanna's eyes softened. "Good. That was the sort of thing I'd hoped you'd do."

The golem shrugged. For the Germans to deport the Jews from Prague, it was necessary that the deportations be clean and quiet. The Czechs were not an unkind people, on the one occasion that the Germans marched them to the train station by day, the Czech witnesses were horrified at the spectacle. The men ostentatiously doffed their hats, and the women wept. To the extent that the golem had made the deportation cleaner—more painless—she had served the Germans that day, and not the Jews of Prague.

It didn't matter. Nothing she did would matter.

"Do you have anything else you want me to do today?" she asked.

But Alena had no more messages that needed to be delivered, and hadn't yet made contact with the Resistance to tell them about their new volunteer—her cousin Margit, who had an almost supernatural ability to avoid attracting the attention of the authorities. They passed the evening in companionable discomfort, the golem watching the two women eat. She did *enjoy* eating, when she had the opportunity. Hanna's cooking smelled delicious, defying the limits of the ration book. Well. It was understandable that they wouldn't want to share, and the fact that the golem didn't have to eat would come in handy in seven months, when she was free.

The Prague Resistance was initially suspicious of Alena's claims regarding Margit's abilities. But after a few close calls (easy enough for the golem to produce), they accepted their good fortune. After that, the golem spent most of each day delivering messages, walking from one end of Prague to the other.

One day in early spring, the golem's duties took her beyond the Trade Fair grounds and farther toward the edge of Holesovice. Afterward, as she walked home along the curving roadway, she realized that she was standing somewhere that would be important. Looking around, she realized this was the spot where Heydrich would be assassinated at the end of May. The assassins had trained in England, and had been dropped by parachute in December. On the evening of May 27, the first assassin would fire his gun only to have it jam; another would see that the gun had misfired and hurl a grenade. The shrapnel from the grenade would severely wound Heydrich, though he would cling to life for several days. Thousands would die in the reprisals that would follow—in addition to wiping out every trace they could find of the Resistance, the Germans would execute the entire male population of a town called Lidice, then send the women to concentration camps and the children to German families.

The golem was standing where the assassin would stand. A chill rippled through her body. Shuddering, she turned and walked back the way she had come, then took a fork in the road and headed away from Prague.

She had been walking for 20 minutes when she realized what she'd done.

Hanna had not told her to do this. Hanna had told her to deliver the message and return.

She sat down abruptly by the roadway. She had disobeyed—she hadn't meant to, but she had been able to, nonetheless. *If I don't have to obey Hanna, then I don't have to wait for her to die. I can go anywhere.* The Czech countryside stretched out before her; she could

"Bullets will not stop me," the golem said. "But a hot enough fire can consume even clay."

see it like a map. Wartorn, yes, but she knew where the bombs would fall, and which buildings would stand through the war. I'll go to Litomerice, she thought. I've never seen it. I'll find a job—but for that she really *would* need papers, and Alena hadn't gotten them for her yet. Well, it didn't matter—she'd come up with something.

First, though, she would celebrate her freedom. She took out a cigarette from Shayna's cigarette case. Hanna would not want her to do this—Hanna would want her to hand over the cigarettes, so that they could be used for small bribes. The golem struck a match and lit the cigarette, breathing in the bitter smoke. The cigarette made her feel a little lightheaded, and her lungs burned, but even the pain was exhilarating. She didn't have to wait until June: she was free now.

As the golem finished her cigarette, she heard footsteps behind her and turned around. There was a young woman, Jewish, carrying a suitcase. No doubt she was headed for the Trade Fair grounds. The information clicked in like the snap of a purse opening: Dobre Kaufman, 24 years old, single. Blonde enough to pass as Czech, but without the connections to get false papers. Besides, she believed what the Germans had told her about Terezin, that she would be safe there. She'd survive Terezin, then be shipped out to Auschwitz in one of the last transports. The golem realized with depressed astonishment that Dobre would die only a week before the Red Army would arrive to liberate her.

"Excuse me," the golem said.

Dobre looked up.

The golem took out the cigarette case and opened it. Shayna's pearl was still there. There was a man in Holesovice who made false documents. He'd been executed in the purges after Heydrich's assassination, but that was months away. And he worked cheap. "If you go to Terezin as you've been ordered, you will not survive the war," she said. She put the pearl in Dobre's hand. "Take this to Vysebrad 2. Tell the man who answers the door that Stépan sent you, and give him the pearl. Have him make you false papers that say you're Catholic. Go somewhere where nobody knows you and don't tell *anyone* that you're Jewish, not until the end of the war. If you do as I say, you *might* survive."

Dobre stared at her in silent wonder.

"Do you understand me?" the golem asked impatiently.

"Yes," Dobre said. "Who are you? Why are you helping me?"

"Don't ask questions. Just do as I tell you." The golem walked away before the girl could ask her anything else. Let the girl think what she wanted—the golem had done what she could.

She realized after a few minutes of walking that she had automatically headed back toward Prague. Well, it hardly mattered. She knew that Hanna would die in June, and the golem would be free. Perhaps in the meantime Alena would get her the false papers. Maybe if she arranged to have a close call or two, that would encourage Alena to take care of it. Or if she came up with something she'd *definitely* need papers for, like rail travel or a job. She could go back to Prague for now, it wouldn't hurt anything.

First, though, she thought she'd spend the night outside—just because she knew she could. It was still cold out, but the cold didn't bother her. She crossed the river, then settled down under the bridge where it was dry. She smoked two more cigarettes as she waited for the dawn to come. As she finished the second, she found herself thinking about Dobre, and she realized with a shock that she no longer *knew* Dobre's fate—it was as if the page she'd been looking at was now simply missing. She found herself poking at it mentally, like the tongue pokes a missing tooth. Still gone.

Dobre must have taken her advice. She might or might not live, but she would no longer die from typhus and starvation one week before liberation.

It occurred to her suddenly that something she had done might also have changed Hanna's fate, but no, that was still there. Relieved, she headed back to the apartment.

The golem expected Alena and Hanna to be angry, and had invented a story. Alena was watching for her out the window, but when she arrived, Alena pulled her into a hug. "Thank God you're safe," she said. After a moment, she closed the apartment door. "Hanna has gone out to look for you. She has this crazy idea you're in the Old Jewish Cemetery. I was sure you'd been arrested, and I was so terrified—we'd never be able to raise bribe money."

"Arrested?" the golem said. "*Me?*"

Alena led the golem back to the kitchen and started water for tea. Hanna arrived a few minutes later.

"She's here," Alena said.

Hanna almost burst into tears. "We were so worried," she said. "Where were you?"

"I heard a patrol coming and hid," the golem said. "I figured they'd be on their way in a few minutes, but then they stood around smoking cigarettes for hours. There were a lot of patrols around—I ended up waiting until morning, and then they thinned out."

It was a pathetic story; of course, the golem would know exactly when the patrol would leave, just as she would know when they were coming. She could not be trapped like that. But Hanna wanted to believe her, and she did.

"You did exactly the right thing," Alena said. "You're one of the most valuable members of the Resistance right now. We can't afford to lose you."

Hanna rose and spooned out a bowl of porridge for the golem. "Have something to eat," she said.

The golem had errands to run on May 27, the day that Heydrich would be shot, but fortunately none of them took her anywhere near Holesovice. She didn't tell Hanna or Alena about the assassination before it happened; they had lectured her several times on need-to-know, and this definitely qualified. Still, she took the streetcar to deliver her messages, and returned home as quickly as she could.

Heydrich was shot in the evening. The crackdowns began within hours. The assassins had hidden well and would not be found until June 18, but the Germans recovered enough evidence at the scene of the attack to identify certain key members of the Resistance. They were arrested and interrogated, the wheels of the Nazi machine turned, crushing their bodies beneath it, and moved outward from there.

Radek, who appeared on Alena and Hanna's doorstep at two in the morning on June 14, was not a leader of the Resistance but a friend of Alena's. Alena yanked him into the parlor without a word, closed the door, and took him to the back room.

"You shouldn't have taken me in," he said. "I'm putting you both in danger."

"That's for us to decide," Alena said. "So hush. Are you hurt?"

"No. I got a warning five minutes before they arrived." Radek looked like he'd left home in a hurry—unshaven, he wore his nightshirt tucked into trousers, with an overcoat thrown on over the top, despite the summer heat.

Alena settled Radek in her bed, to get a few hours' rest. At dawn, she would go out to get a razor and less conspicuous clothes for him—and, if she could, false papers. *This is it*, the golem thought. The man who would sell her the papers would be arrested later that day; when interrogated, he would implicate Alena. The

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Thrushbeard

The old tales end with "happily ever after." But at what cost?

Growing up as a princess is more difficult than you might think. You steal handfuls of dried peas from the kitchen and stuff them under your mattress, and when you don't feel anything in the night, you worry that you might be adopted. You develop strange phobias about spinning wheels and frogs.

I'll never regret the time I was learning French and I had to dance in Spanish. As it turned out, the story of the king who sacrificed his daughter so that he could grow wealthy was a favorite picture. How they think. The problem with a king is, he can usually be a good king or a good daddy, but almost never both at the same time. I don't think that my father was either one. At any rate, I decided to sacrifice more sheep. I think I would rather take my chances with the gods. At least they don't expect to marry you after they've taken what they want.

When I was five my mother showed me her wedding gown, and she told me that someday I would have one like it for myself. I thought it was a beautiful dress, of course, and I wanted to put it on, but her belly was big with my younger brother then, and she sold me with that dress. We were in her room, and she was teaching me how to spin. I recall with a distaff. She owned an expensive spinning wheel that she left in situ, ensconced in the corner, and her fingers spun the distaff so cleverly that the thread was just as fine.

I asked her why she never used the wheel, and she told me that she loved using the distaff, that it relaxed her. She loved watching it as it spun and twisted the fibers. Then she said, "There's another reason too, dearheart. This distaff it was the only thing they let me bring, from before."

I had heard, vaguely, that my mother had been a commoner before her marriage. I didn't understand what it meant, except that it had something to do with why the other court ladies didn't like her.

She ran her fingers along the wood-wrapped shank. "This was made for me by someone back then. Someone special. A long time ago."

She looked out the window for a long time. "You give things up," she said finally. "You pay a price. Always remember that, sweetheart. No matter how much it looks like a gift. They always want something in return. Try not to give it to them, if you're strong enough, if you can ever learn how."

Then she looked at me, and saw that my lip was quivering, and her sadness flew away from her like an autumn robin. "Oh sweetbread, I'm sorry. Of course it will be different for you. All pretty beds are sugar flowers, yes my dollymop, my springtime, my own sweet princess stargazing." She tickled me and I laughed, and together we rolled over and over on her wide, wide bed.

Three months later she was dead. Many years later I asked the court doctor how it happened. He told me that, when I was born, my mother had developed a great fever, and it had been decided to limit her childbearing, and I was conceived. He told me, kingly that he should refrain from getting her with child again, that it was unwise, her weakened physique. My father told him that after there was a certain age, when women come into it, speak of childbearing. And sure enough, my brother was born and my mother died, and no doubt many in the kingdom thought it an acceptable trade.

I grew up as the world's image of a princess, able to obtain anything in the kingdom that I had the will to ask for. Mornings I rose, a moment from my shelf full of irises. Their colors shocked me each day's rising, clothes. Gardeners would repaint whose flowerboxes when the wind changed. I keep my bedroom smelling sweet. When I told my father that I wished to study birds, he ordered an aviary put up overnight, with all the species in the kingdom offered, a penny an egg and threepence for fledglings. He honeyed the bars of my cage until I scarcely noticed they were there.

By Bruce Glassco Illustration by Broeck Steadman

As my womanhood began to come upon me, the princes began their visits. Supposedly they came to see my father, but before long I would invariably be paraded before them, brought into the council chamber by my nurse to say goodnight, or looked down upon by the two men from a balcony as I sat in my garden sketching my goshawk, Vivienne. I hated being shown off, but what was I to do? I was beginning to understand what my mother had tried to tell me. I could sense the path I was being led along—after all, what is a princess for but to become a queen?—and my spirit rebelled. Why could I not simply be left alone with my birds? I could see no way off the road, though, and my temper began to fray like the coverlet my mother had woven for me. When the boys and the men that my father brought home began to pay court, they were insipid and dull, and I found it difficult to keep up the painted face that I had been taught to wear. I began to acquire the reputation of the Shrew.

"Am I a shrew?" I asked the boy Merlin. He was named Merlin after the hawk, not the magician—his family had been austringers for generations, and hawks were all they knew. He was three years older than I, with shaggy unkempt hair and a raptor's habit of staring at some far-distant thing for minutes at a time, then moving all at once.

"A shrew? You mean a cursed woman? Let me see." He paused to give the question due consideration, winding his creance as he thought. We had ridden up to a meadow high above the castle to train Vivienne to fly at a lure, and we were sitting beneath a tree and letting the bird rest.

"No, I wouldn't call you a shrew," he said finally, not looking at me. "Old Peg in the kitchen might be one of them shrews, because she's had a miserable life and she's none too fond of people, but she's a good enough cook that she can be rude and folks won't hold it against her. You . . . I think you're rude to all those fellows because you're afraid of them. You hope that if you're mean enough they'll go away and leave you alone. Right?" He wasn't looking at me as he spoke, so I stopped looking at him. I sat back against the tree trunk and looked at the sky.

There were two free sparrow-hawks up there, wheeling and turning as they looked down at us from above. My Vivienne was watching them too, from the makeshift perch we had made for her. She was tied to it by her jesses, and she knew enough not to bate to take wing and end up hanging upside-down in undignified flapping chaos beneath her perch. But she was watching them. Merlin took out a leather hood and tied it around the bird's head, so that she could not see.

"Why do they come back?" I asked, reaching for another subject. "The birds, once you've trained them and set them after game. Why don't they just fly away? You've broken their spirit somehow, right?"

Merlin finished lacing up the bird's hood and sat down carefully in the grass beside me. Every motion he made was slow and deliberate, birds don't like sudden movements.

"You're thinking about them horses," he said once he was settled. "If you want them to pull carts, you have to put their spirits down. Hawks, now, they'll never forgive you if they see you being cruel to them. They'll sooner die than knuckle under."

Vivienne cocked her head as if she were listening to us. She was the most beautiful thing I could imagine. Merlin took a feather from his pouch and stroked her murderous talons as they clutched the perch. "This one, I trained her myself. She was born right here in our mews, you know."

I knew that, I told him. I had always tried to find out everything about my birds.

The sparrow-hawks were gone to the north, and he unhooded Vivi and let her step onto his glove. "My pa says that you can't get it to trust you unless you're better at being a man than it is at being a hawk. So you stay awake with it. Three days and nights, it took me with your bird here. When she's hungry enough she'll eat from your hand, and when she's tired enough she'll fall asleep on your arm. And then, you know, she's yours."

"But that's so cruel!" I cried, dismayed.

Merlin shrugged. "They get hungrier out on their own during winter. And a glove makes a right fine perch. You ask me, I believe they like it better, over the long flight. A mews is warm come winter, and then they have an audience when they do the thing they do best. 'Tis a fine thing, to see one bring down a coney from off your hand, isn't not?"

"All the same," I said, "There must be a better way. I'll bet I can find one. I bet that I can take a wild hawk and train it to trust me, and not be cruel to it or underfeed it or make it stay awake."

"You give things up," she said. "You pay a price. No matter how much it looks like a gift, they always want something in return."

"If you say so, Princess," he shrugged. "One thing, though. *They* don't see it as cruelty. If they did, they'd never forgive you. They've got good memories, birds do." He put the bird back on her perch and began getting the horses ready, and I realized suddenly that it was almost noon. As he was helping me onto my horse, he said, "One thing more. If you want to be cruel to a bird, just look it in the eyes. They hate that above all."

"All the same, though, I'll train one myself. I will. You'll help me, won't you, Merlin?"

He glanced up at me briefly when I asked him that, his blue eyes seeming enormous beneath his shaggy brown hair. "Aye, that I will, Princess. That I will." As we rode back to the castle the sparrow hawks returned, circling behind us until the hillside was lost in cloud.

Merlin delivered my new hawk, one of his merlin namesakes, the following week. I had insisted on a passager, an adult bird captured while migrating. I named her Freedom, kept her in my room, and tried to tame her myself. Every morning I fetched a bag of bloody scraps from Peg in the kitchen, and I fed them to her by hand when she showed me signs of trust. My room was full of the smell of feathers and warm blood, and at night I listened to her screams as she dreamt of bloody murder.

Merlin told me that I was feeding her too much. If you want a pet, he said, get a spaniel or a goldfinch. A raptor is a killer with no use for affection. If you can't be more ruthless than she is, you should set her free. And yet I loved her most perhaps because she did defy me, because she was terrified and beautiful, because she wanted nothing from me but food, and because to her I was not a princess but just some strange ungainly perch.

I do not know how it is for commoners, but for princesses, the great work of a lifetime is to trace out all the myriad interlacings between power and love and fear. As a princess I had power of life and death over Merlin, and neither of us could forget that for a heart-

beat And yet he had power over me as well, with those strange unblinking eyes that always slid off of me to gaze at some point in the middle distance. When I finally was able to capture his undivided gaze, I felt as triumphant as a king with a victorious army. My father had power over us both, and our fear of him made us hide our growing love in back stairways and midnight balconies. The fear and the power made the love more intense, burning savagely like Freedom's pitiless mad gaze

Of course they caught us, eventually. That was when the doting father I thought was mine suddenly disappeared, and I discovered a cursing, screaming monster in his place The fact that he had done the same thing as a prince only angered him more, and the court whispers of base blood rising to the surface made things far worse Although I had done nothing with Merlin to besmirch my royal name, there was no forgiveness. While I watched screaming from my bedroom prison, the soldiers of the guard cut the boy's throat in the courtyard like a dog. His sky-blue gaze was on me to the last.

After that my shrewishness blossomed like a savage flower. I hated the dukes and lordlings who looked at me with frank, appraising stares almost as much as I hated my father, and I told them what I thought of their mincing lordly ways in no uncertain terms I scorned them for their lying tongues that said one thing and meant another, for their soft hands that had never seen honest work, for their insipid features and crooked gaits and whatever else I thought might hurt them the way I had been hurt. The misery around the palace grew so bad that my father even gave me a half-hearted apology, but I snuffed at him and he turned around and raged even more. And so one day my father summoned me with an unusually sharp message, and when I arrived in the throne room the whole court was there, watching me expectantly I recognized the man before them by the elaborate heraldry brocaded on the backs of his retainers. This was no mere prince, this was King Clarens, lord of a realm double ours in size and triple it in revenue

"King Clarens," said my father, "meet my daughter Some say she possesses a sharp tongue, but perhaps that is only toward the boys of our neighborhood, not the men of your kingdom Daughter, take a good look at the King here Have you ever seen a handsomer man?"

Underneath his bantering tone, I could hear a note of pleading. I could only guess at the kinds of promises he had made to bring someone like Clarens here His prestige among his peers was on the line, I knew, already his accomplishments in war and administration and law were being forgotten, and at home and abroad he was spoken of as The King with the Shrewish Daughter Please, his voice seemed to say, please accept this one. If you don't, I won't be responsible for the consequences

The court leaned forward as I gazed at the new king. He was tall, muscular, with beard and hair even yellower than mine. I think that, even then, I might have been reclaimed to humanity by someone who had treated me with a trace of tenderness or compassion But when I looked into his eyes, my heart went cold They were as blue and cold and sharp as icicles, and I felt those icicles stab me as I stared They saw me as a prize to be won—no—to be claimed, like an inheritance is claimed. I saw those eyes and knew instinctively that they could never look at me, or anyone else, in love.

Then I glanced lower down on his face, and for a moment I almost smiled, for he had carefully trained his beard to a point, and a sillier bit of foliage you could scarcely imagine I tried to put icicles into my own eyes to match his, and I raised my head to meet his gaze "What a chin he has, to be sure," I said, and I heard everyone in the room drawing breaths and holding them "Sharp like the beak of a thrush I shall call him King Thrushbeard " And I laughed

I suppose that, in his mind, that laugh justified everything that came after Not that he would have admitted that I hurt his pride, of course But one can't have one's potential queen going around and insulting noblemen. It isn't done.

I thought then that my father had gone mad. He got up from his throne and came screaming at me, saying I was a disgrace to him, that he regretted ever having begot me, that I was the worst daughter any king had ever raised. Then he said something that felt as if he had snatched up the icicles from Clarens' eyes and stabbed me to the heart with them

"I swear this," he said. "I swear it before all the lords of this realm here present, and before God himself, that I will marry my daughter off to the next man who comes to my door, whether royal-born or base! Take her to her room, and don't let her out until I send for her for her wedding!" Then I was being bustled away, crying for my father to hear me, and he was turning away The last things I saw as I left the room were the cold eyes of Clarens, piercing me like five months of winter

The rest of that day was more nightmare. I was locked up in my room, writing frantic letters to my father that the guard at the door told me he was under orders not to accept. The next morning the captain of my father's guard came for me, a big jolly man who used to play hide and seek with me when I was little, and who always let his foot show beneath the curtain so I'd be able to find him Now his face was set in a kind of surprised scowl, and he did not meet my eyes

He said that my father was carrying out the terms of his pledge, and that I would be wed to a traveling hunchbacked tinker who had arrived at the castle asking if we had any old pots to be repaired. The situation had been explained to the man, and he had agreed that a wife might be useful in his line of work But he didn't want me wearing anything fancy, for fancy clothes would attract robbers. My mother's wedding dress was not for me, I was to put on the cast-off dress of one of the kitchen-drudges, and be married in that. Then I was to take to the road with my new husband, and the doors of the castle would be shut behind us forever.

I'm not particularly proud of the spectacle I made of myself that day. I used every tactic I could think of, from little-girl pleading, to royal tongue-lashings of everyone in sight using language no one thought I knew, to buckets of tears, to struggling like a damp cat when my serving women tried to put the dress on me When they finally got me into the chapel I flew at the bishop with my nails extended, and the captain had to physically restrain me during the brief service. I remained stubbornly silent except for occasional curses that shocked the bishop, and when it came my turn to speak, the captain had to answer "She does" from behind me I had brought along my letters, hoping to give at least one to my father, but he never appeared.

Then I turned to look at the bridegroom, and I had to stifle a gasp He had evidently been willing to sacrifice his dignity for this charade, but not a lasting alteration to his person The hunched back, eye-patch, and black hair dye were moderately convincing, but he had kept the pointed beard, and one piercing blue eye still transfixed me like a sword. King Thrushbeard put one strong arm around me and kissed me, roughly Then he grasped my hand and half led, half dragged me out of my home and into the wide world I never even had time to say goodbye to my hawks

We walked all afternoon, without either of us speaking The king walked very fast, using a long willow staff to propel himself along, and I sometimes had to jog to keep up. It was early November, and the wind was beginning to whine questioningly from the north like a hungry cat. I shivered as I walked, my arms wrapped tightly around me as if I might fall apart at any second, and the wind stung the tears in my eyes till they froze I did not look at Clarens, who had shouldered an enormous pack filled with tools and pots and pans obviously raided from his own pack train or our kitchens, finer than any real tinker could ever have carried

I was too numb to ask him what the point was to his ridiculous disguise Also, I guessed that if he wanted me to believe he was someone else, it might give me some shred of advantage if he thought I was to be so easily fooled.

We took shelter for the evening in a weathered and leaning barn that provided little barrier against the wind that seemed to build and build. Occasional gusts of freezing rain blew in through the gaps in

the walls. I found a small patch of dirty straw, too sticky to be blown away by the wind, and I resolutely sat

"Up, wife," yelled the king. "Or are you too spoiled by your time in the castle to do any real wife's work? Build a fire, woman, for god's sake, so we aren't frozen to our bones! You *do* know how to build a fire, don't you?"

"Build one yourself!" I screamed at him. "I see nothing here that will burn except for this straw, and that would barely last a minute. Or do you wish me to try pulling damp wood from this burn, which could bring the roof down on both our heads, which God knows might be no bad thing? And I hardly had time to bring flint and tinder when I was dragged from my home, though I suppose you have them in that enormous pack of yours. Build one yourself I say!"

"She doesn't know how to build a fire," cried the King. "Fore God I have made a bad bargain with my wife! The fire can wait, but I shall at least teach my wife to keep a civil tongue in her head when she speaks to her husband."

Before I could react he had spun me around, lifted the willow wand he had been using as a staff all day, and brought it down across my shoulders. I was knocked to the ground and lay there, moaning, while he continued to hit. And suddenly things became brilliantly clear to me, and I could almost hear the conversation that must have taken place between Clarens and my father before I was summoned for that first meeting.

"Lovely girl," says my father, "but what a tongue on her! What a temper! Now if only a man could tame her."

"You know what the peasants do when their wives misbehave, don't you?" says Clarens cautiously.

"Beat them soundly, yes," says my father. "No doubt that's exactly what she needs. But one can't just go around drubbing queens, now, can one? Or princesses either, for that matter."

"Listen," says Clarens, "there might be a way."

Before I could pass out from the pain and shock, he dropped the stick and fell down beside me. When he took my maidenhead, I dragged my fingernails hard across his back. I have heard that men take this as a sign of passion in a woman. I don't know about other women, but with me, it was a sign of my desire to strip the flesh off of his bones and throw it into the sky like streamers.

Listen, here's a comic song my brother sang to me once. There's a cooper who manages to get a noblewoman to fall in love with him, and he marries her. Among peasants and among nobles, though, the first purpose of marriage is financial, and before long he finds out that she's a poor bargain. Her cooking is terrible, and she can't spin or brew ale or do any of the other things that peasant women do. What a predicament.

One day when his wife is asleep, he takes a sheepskin and throws it over her back, and then he picks up a stick and starts laying into her.

"What are you doing?" she screams, waking up terrified.

"I can't beat you, because of your gentle kinfolk," says he. "But I can certainly tan my own sheepskin, can't I?"

In the last verse she learns how to cook and spin, and she promises to forget her highborn family.

You don't think it's funny either? My brother always said that women don't have a sense of humor.

After two days of travel we crossed the border into Clarens' country. I knew, because he brought it up himself.

"Do you know who this forest belongs to?" he asked, swishing his stick to behead the roadside thistles.

"I have no idea," I said, though I had a pretty shrewd guess. I was watching for the yellow finches that might have lived off those thistles, eating their seeds and lining their nests with the soft down inside.

"The whole thing belongs to the King you called Thrushbeard," he told me with obvious pride. "If you had married him, everything here would have been yours as well."

I had been spending the journey thinking about my situation. Clearly, this whole charade must have two purposes: to punish me for laughing at him, and to curb my shrewish spirit. Clarens might be a stranger to love, but he knew all about power and fear. Now I would have to learn those lessons too.

If I ever wanted to sit by a warm fire again, I would have to start acting punished and curbed. It would be hard, hard to hold back a tongue that had once known the freedom of a princess, but that was the only path open to me now.

I decided to try flattery. "What a fool I was! Why, oh why did I insult that handsome King Thrushbeard? If only I had married him when he wanted me!" And then, unable to help myself, I added, "If only I had married him instead of you!" He shot me a sideways look, but he seemed pleased nevertheless.

I kept up the act for the rest of the trip because, I suppose, it didn't cost me anything. "Who owns that well?" "Who owns that rock quarry?" "Who owns that sludge pit?" in my best impression of wistful, and he'd beam and do his best to make me feel stupid for rejecting him. He never seemed to tire of the game. I take back what I said. Perhaps it did cost me something.

When we reached the capital I was hoping that he'd give up the charade and go straight to the palace, but suddenly outside the city, he stopped and put his hand beneath my chin and stared into my eyes. I felt the icicles reaching deep inside me, but I thought of the hot mad red eyes of Freedom my hawk, and I held his gaze.

After a long minute he looked away. "It is not pleasant to me to hear you constantly wishing that you had married some one else. Am I not good enough for you?" I knew then that I had failed some kind of test. When we finally stopped walking, it was in front of the most ramshackle, the most dilapidated, the least waterproof shack I had ever seen or imagined.

"This is your new home," he told me. He didn't say "our" home, and it turned out that he was gone most days—some nights, too. At the palace, or with a mistress, or who knows what. Doing King things. The times when he was with me were more than enough.

He figured out quickly that the beatings weren't helping. They were making me sullen, and that wasn't what he wanted in a Queen. He wanted docile, obedient, harmless.

He set out to convince me that I was worthless.

This is horrible," he'd yell, spitting out the soup I had made for him. "What use is a woman who can't cook? That soft palace life has ruined you for any real work!" I didn't ask him how I was supposed to make a good supper when all he gave me was half a cabbage, two green onions, some pepper and a cup of lard.

But overall I was no bad cook, so he sought a harder task. "Baskets," he said one day, throwing down a pile of willow twigs. "Weave them." And he left.

I readily confess that I had never seen a basket woven in my life. If he had told me that the twigs needed to be soaked first, or given me one of his pots to soak them in, I might have had better success. As it was, I struggled with the harsh sticks all day, and ended with nothing but a pile of broken kindling and angry blisters on my fingers.

Next he tried me with spinning, which I at least knew the rudiments of. With my wheel from home and the silk I was used to, I might have done an adequate job. But my mother had not lived long enough to teach me how to use her spindle, and with nothing but one of those and coarse wool to work with, I only managed to catch the rough fibers on my blisters and break them open, until the thread I spun was wet with blood.

See, now," said my husband, "you are good for nothing at work. I am badly off indeed with such a helpless wife."

You may wonder why I didn't run away, and I thought about it, many nights as he snored beside me. Or another option: opening his pack, taking out his fine steel hunting knife, and stabbing him again and again, once for every blow he had ever given me. But the world, I knew, was not kind to penniless women, even less so if they were beautiful. If I went home, my father would hand me back to Clarens. Or to justice, if I committed suicide. There might even be a war.

One day Clarens dragged me into the city. On a corner of the market a little stall was set up, filled with clay pots. The kiln must have

been left untended when the batch was made for the ones that weren't cracked were burned black, and many were both.

"Sell these," he said, "and bring me home any profits that you make. And if there are no profits, then there will be nothing for you to eat."

I saw through his latest game. He knew that I was resisting his own insults. If I was rejected by others as well, though, then perhaps the ridicule of the crowd would break me. A more public humiliation.

He had miscalculated. He had forgotten—and indeed, so had I—what got me into trouble in the first place: my beauty. I'm sure I looked a pathetic enough sight sitting there with my disgusting wares, and before long a kind-looking man came up, nervously eyeing his wife buying radishes across the street, and offered me three copper coins for a teapot with no spout. It was an outrageous price but I took it and gave him my best smile. Later he came back with two friends, and they left with six pots. It had been a long time since I had smiled, and it felt good. Not a single woman came near my stall, but by the end of the day all my wares were gone.

When I dumped the money in his lap that evening, I met his eyes in triumph, and he scowled. "Not bad, wife," he said through clenched teeth. "Tomorrow I will buy more for you." I went to sleep that night dreaming that, if I could not be a Queen or a Princess, I might at least make a tolerable merchant.

pieces. I looked again at the candle's flame. It was not a flame but a red bird, and it took off suddenly from my shattered hands and flew off toward the infinite sky. When I awoke, I knew that I would sooner die than be overcome. I thought death was a definite possibility.

The next morning there was snow drifting through the chinks in our hovel, and Clarens had evidently decided that enough was enough.

"I have just been to the King's castle, and they told me that they need a kitchen maid. It will pay very little, but you will be allowed to take home some scraps." At the time, I would have agreed to feed the king's pigs if they would let me share the slops.

The great kitchen had dozens of servants rushing about through smoky, cabbage-scented air, evidently a great feast was being prepared. Some of the pots and pans I scrubbed, I recognized from the King's sojourn as a tinker. I watched enviously as the heaped platters were carried out to the banquet, and when the guests' plates came back to be cleaned, the cook allowed me to eat as much as I wished of the gnawed-upon bones and greasy scraps, and scrape what was left into a clay jar to take home.

When all the plates were cleaned I got ready to leave through the snow. "But wait," said the cook with a malicious twinkle, "don't you want a peep at the guests for the King's wedding?"

The room spun around me with hunger and despair. "His wed-

He spun me around, lifted the willow wand he had been using as a staff all day, and brought it down across my shoulders.

The next day in the marketplace, I had already sold a dozen pots when I heard a horse galloping down the road. On its back was a soldier, holding the reins with one hand and beating the horse's flank with the other. I saw the terror in the beast's eyes as the soldier steered it headlong into my stall, and as I dove out of the way the rack of pots exploded in a rain of clay shards. Once past me the horse slowed to an uneven trot, and I wondered if it might be permanently maimed from the collision. As soon as I had seen the soldier, of course, I had recognized the pointed beard, dyed gray this time, thrusting forward like a spear.

"Only a fool would put such delicate wares at such a dangerous corner of the market," was all my husband said when I got home, and I had no supper that night.

My spirit was still not broken, however, and evidently the horse had reminded him of what he knew about spirited animals. He set out to treat me as a proud hawk or a warhorse is treated, but I was no irrational creature, and I knew cruelty when I saw it.

Under the excuse that I had allowed the last of our worldly goods to be smashed, he stopped bringing home even the scraps of food we had previously eaten. I became weak, listless, and fast approaching despair. The palace of my youth was nothing more than a fairy tale. Even if I had had the will to run away, I would have lacked the strength.

In a dream one night, my husband appeared to me, 12 feet tall and riding a white horse made of ice. "Surrender," he said, and his breath was a blizzard. I found that I was holding a candle, and I tried desperately to shield it with my hands and body as the freezing wind made it flicker and spark. "Surrender!"

I felt my arms slowly turning to ice. He would turn me entirely to ice and I would break and perish forever, I knew, unless I dropped the candle, and yet I held it fast as the cold crept up my fingers and legs. I felt a great crack running through me, but just as I broke to

ding!" I mumbled. "He's got someone else—then he never even *meant* to ...," but the cook grabbed my hand and pulled me up a staircase, and I found myself behind a velvet curtain looking out at a crowd of whirling dancers.

Then the King was striding toward me, and I knew that I had been the victim of one last deception. There was no other bride, it was my own wedding that was being celebrated without me, my own wedding feast that I had eaten the scraps of as I starved.

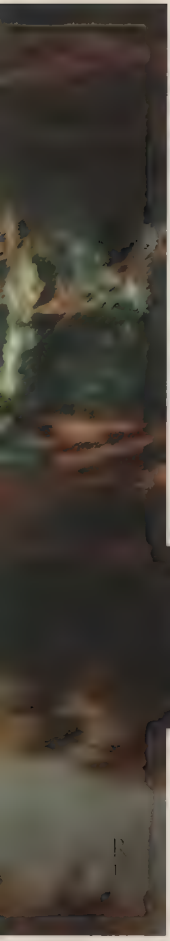
I had dreamed that when he finally threw off the masquerade, he would at least allow me a decent gown. First impressions are important, as everyone knows, and the people in the room were nobles and barons whose good will and opinion would be vital to me as Queen. But he grabbed my arm as I struggled mightily, and pulled me out into the light of the ballroom in perhaps the foulest rags in the kingdom, heavy with mud and the smell of cabbage and grease, with my legs and shoulders bare for all the world to see. The strap with which I had tied the jar of scraps to my waist broke, and the jar fell and scattered its gelid contents across the floor. At the sound, all the glittering nobility turned to stare at me in my rags, and when they saw me they laughed.

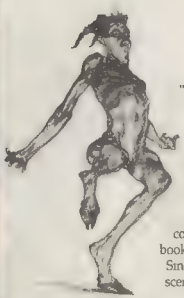
So that was the long and the short of the revenge of King Clarens on a girl who compared his beard to the beak of the noble thrush—one of my favorite birds, indeed, and not much of an insult after all I had two wedding days, and if I had thought that the first one was the worst day of my life, he surpassed it with the second.

I broke away from him and rushed down the stairs, but he caught up with me by the palace doorway, and held me, and gave me the whole wretched story. "My love for you made me disguise myself," et cetera, et cetera, on through the pots and the soldier and all the petty rest of it. "I hoped," he said at last as explanation, "that your proud thoughts would be humbled, and your haughty spirit bent, and that it would be a punishment for having mocked and spurned

Continued on page 99

BY KAREN HABER





"DON'T TOUCH ANYTHING RED."

This was the sage advice that Rick Berry's pilot father told eight-year-old Rick just before he took him for his first ride in the sky. You might say that Berry has been flying by the seat of his pants, artistically, ever since.

A fearless approach to media and metaphor has taken this protean talent where no artist had ever gone before, namely into cyberart. Berry was the first artist to employ the computer as a tool for his artwork and created the first computer-generated cover for a mass market paperback book, William Gibson's *Neuromancer*.

Since then, Berry has roamed the creative cyberworld, transcending genre and media. His faithful companion and collaborator along that creative journey has been cyberartist Darrel Anderson. Together, Berry and Anderson form the collaborative art entity known as BRAID, the source of startling, profound, funny, and beautiful images.

RICK BERRY:

WHERE NO ARTIST HAS GONE BEFORE

"Our discovery of collaborative creativity was accidental," Berry recalls. "It arose principally from a relationship that began when we were high-school kids dodging Vietnam and the rest of the system. We had the luck to encounter the underground comix model, which changed our approach to creating art. Part of that paradigm is the notion of pencilers and inkers, which sounds prosaic but is actually complex.

"There are myriad protocols about which one must grow up. For example, if you submit a beloved sketch to an inker, you are at risk. Or if you submit it and it comes out much better than you expected—it's been improved by the inker—then you take a big hit to your ego.

"IF YOU ARE BOLD ENOUGH to say out loud 'Wow, that really turned out a lot better than I expected,' you know the silent portion of that statment was 'I didn't do this alone—it's so good because you did it as well.' And the wonderful discovery is the other guy was thinking the same thing."

By turns profound, raunchy, poignant, and funny as hell, Berry is also a tremendous storyteller, which is obvious in his work. But what he really enjoys is performing "visual jazz" with Anderson and occasionally with his wife, Sheila Vaughan Berry. His bliss is a collaborative act of creativity where he is merely one of the players sitting in. If you ask, Berry might agree that it's the oldest established permanent floating jazz session around, one that began with that primal act of creation, the Big Bang.

"The idea comes and gets us, not the other way around," he says. "We're just riding these quantum waves. How else can you explain the phenomenon of simultaneity in the arts?"

Rick Berry may be the closest thing that fantastic art has to a philosopher prince. He reads physics for laughs, and has an interesting story to tell on just about any subject. His film credits (with collaborators Darrel Anderson and Gene Bodio) include the 3-D CAD cyberspace climax for TriStar productions' *Johnny Mnemonic*, and more than a few film fans think that his work may have influenced the look of another SF movie starring Keanu Reeves, *The Matrix*.

Berry says that if *Neuromancer* hadn't brought him to digital art, he would have sought it out anyway—he was ready and waiting for it. "I could see the digital thing coming. I'm just one of those guys who reads *Scientific American* for fun. So I was already there, lookin' for the machine, poking around, waiting for the time, right there at the front of the line."

His Fantasy work has had serious impact as well. The iconic image he created for the character "Death" in Neil Gaiman's *Sandman* graphic novel series is a beautiful, haunting piece of work. Rick's wife, Sheila, was the model for the memorable image "Death/Redux," a fact that both pleases and dismays the artist.

"There are times I feel that I've sold her out, given her essence to the cold and heartless commercial world." He swears that everything about the image is true, especially the subject's elegant wrought-iron legs.

Another memorable art connection was made when Berry illustrated the graphic novel version of Harlan Ellison's famous tale, "Repent, Harlequin, Said the Ticktockman."

"Arnie Fenner, who edits *Spectrum Art Annuals* with his wife Cathy, had a vision of tall, beautiful volumes of high-quality, classic tales beautifully put together as art books," Berry recalls. "And Tim Underwood, who specializes in Science Fiction and Fantasy related material, realized that dream beautifully with 'Repent, Harle-

quin....' Perhaps we'll be lucky and see the thing bear further fruit. It was a pleasure to do this book."

Art had its hooks into Berry from childhood. "My mother, who was and is an artist, had a lot to do with my interest in this field. Also due to my father's global adventuring, our house was filled with visual wonders from around the world Big help. I've no formal training so I learned art wherever I could find it And when I became aware of the growth of the underground comic books publishing scene, I took it as the sign I'd been waiting for."

He dropped out of high school in Colorado with his buddy Darrel Anderson and hitched out to his first World Science Fiction Convention in Los Angeles, where the two teenagers set up a table to display their artwork. It was here that they became acquainted with longtime fan and pro writer Frank M. Robinson, who bought some of their artwork

"We met Frank Robinson early on and he provided some of the underpinning of our own philosophies. In short, he told us about a man who had taught him how to write, and said, 'There's no way I can ever pay that guy back unless I do the same somewhere else.'

"That hit us like a thunderbolt We never recovered or wanted to recover from that thought.

"My artistic philosophy came first, but the digital stuff folded in beautifully. And,

From previous spread: One of Rick Berry's more popular images, *Red Prophet* demonstrates the wonders of digital imaging. Inset: Berry explores his humorous side in this pencil sketch entitled *Freddy's Late*.

Above: *The Emerald Gargoyle* awakens from his frozen state.

Left Top: The Samurai of *Five Rings* fame, *Musashi* is a part of nature, held together as a supernatural being.

Left Below: The raw sensuality of *DarkFins*.

although digital offers some considerable advantages over other media in terms of indestructibility, I'm open to using all media."

Perhaps that's how he brings warmth, depth, and poignancy to such a cool medium. In works like "Red Prophet," "Death, Redux," and "The Ice Mother," he combines his skill as a portraitist with his fearless approach to mixing media, ideas, and the inspiration of the moment.

"I've seen a lot of death, and a lot of life, and it all goes into the work. It's not the medium, it's the artist."

Berry's preference for collaboration over solo art creation stems from his experiences among the comix gypsies. "Studios were formed, dissolved, and reformed. I learned so much—I've been so extraordinarily lucky to have worked with some remarkable people."

Among the projects cooking in BRAID are a book, co-authored by Berry and Anderson, entitled *BRAID: An Approach to Collaborative Mind with Art as a Tool of Evidence, Gro-bot*, Anderson's revolutionary program for 3-D object design and creation, and high-quality prints of Berry and Anderson's computer images. Berry is very excited about this last development.

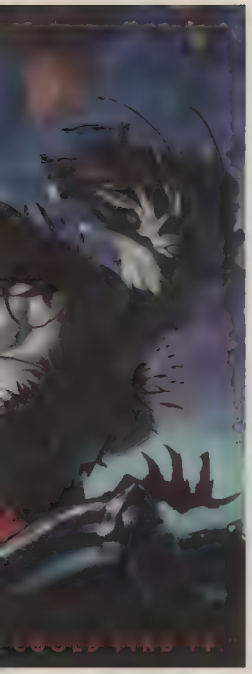
"This was the itch we couldn't scratch: how to make high-quality material output of the beautiful things we were doing on computer. But thanks to a Roland Hi-Fi Jet that prints using nonfugitive pigment inks, and prints on any substrate, we are making prints to die for. The best-looking prints you ever saw in a book can't touch these."

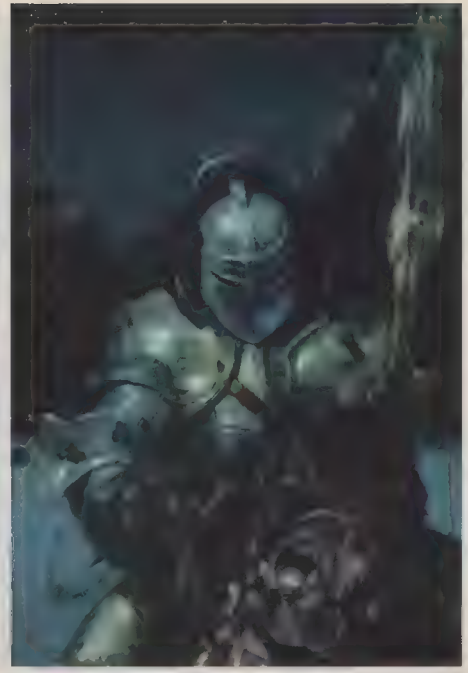
Most recently, Berry did the cover for the *Dictionnaire de la Science Fiction*, Havaas Reference, Paris. His work has appeared in three major history anthologies of the art of Science Fiction and has been collected in *Double Memory: Art and Collaborations*, by Berry and Phil Hale.

And currently, he's creating covers for Del Rey's *Star Wars* novels series. Although I'll admit it's an unlikely pairing, I said yeah when they called me. I find everything interesting."

Berry's art philosophy is as bold and unusual as his creations. "Art has allowed me to do a lot of seeing, and when you can find bold-enough spirits to work with, it's allowed me to see incredible things while enjoying the many protocols that occur between human beings.

"You're surfing the wave of an idea. An

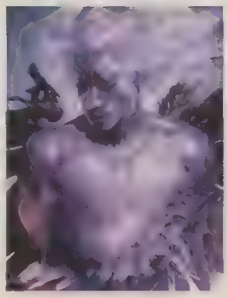




intellectual probability—you don't sit there and tell it what to do. You let it run through you and see if you can handle it.

"Maybe Darrel and I are thrill-seekers Maybe we like being scared. We go out there to the farther reaches of awe. To that extent we're perfectly willing to suffer the randomness of art—take the ride as it comes—assume we'll be quick enough on our feet to use what comes

"Something began 15 or 20 billion years ago, and it's still going on, this one continuous creative act that we are budding consciousness enfolded within, and sometimes we have a sense of these things, and to the degree to which we are capable of having a sense of these things it shows: in our creativity, in our sensitivity to others, in our consciousness That is, I think, the quantum physics of creativity." ❧



Above: Nightcharger rides to resue a damsel in distress.

Left: Used in the Last Unicorn games, *Fallen* cannot contain the power within him.

Center: Reality shifts in Berry's *Bug City*.

Far Left: *Guinevere* , one of twelver heros for Wizards of the Coast, shows the softer side of Berry's work.

THE MAN FOR THE JOB

BY LAWRENCE WATT-EVANS
ILLUSTRATION BY JOEL NAKAMURA

The wizard Gallopius frowned and said, "You know, I wonder sometimes how it is that all these peculiar bits of wizardry one hears about in the legends wound up scattered about the countryside, stashed away in caves and dungeons and the odd mausoleum, rather than put away safe and secure in someone's personal vault. When *I* make some especially puissant talisman, you can rest assured that I don't go hiding it under an altar somewhere, or set some silly chimera guarding it. I keep it close at hand, where I can get my hands on it in a hurry should the need arise." He pulled a thick volume from a shelf, dislodging a cloud of dust.

"Then do you have something we can use?" the tallest of his five visitors rumbled. "This dragon has to go, and my brothers and I—"

"And sister," the only woman among the five interrupted. "I'm part of this too, Buk."

Buk looked at his sister, grimaced, and said, "Yes, well, this dragon is making our lives miserable, and it's plain we can't get rid of it without some magical assistance. Do you have anything here we can use?"

The wizard's frown deepened. "Well, not right here," he admitted. "Our ancestors may have had strange notions about where to hide their magical kickshaws, but there's no denying they knew more about how to make them than anyone alive today. I can whip you up a first-rate aphrodisiac or love philtre in a matter of hours, lay a curse of boils on all and sundry, but weapons fit for fighting a 60-foot fire-breathing dragon? I'm afraid that's beyond me. Haven't a thing that would serve. A plague of boils would just make it mad."

"But everyone in town said you could help us find what we need!" another of the brothers said.

"And indeed I can," the wizard replied. "But I don't have it here, and I can't make it myself. That was the entire point in what I was just saying—I do know of something that should serve your purposes, but I'm afraid it's one of those legendary bits of bric-a-brac that someone tucked away, for reasons I can't begin to imagine, in an eccentric location."

"A quest!" the shortest male among the five exclaimed. "By the Essence, a true quest! Glorious!"

"Oh, shut up, Akdar," said the man who had not yet spoken. "We have a dragon to slay—who has time for quests?"

"We don't appear to have much choice," said Buk. "What is this legendary thing, and where can we find it?"

"It's a helmet," the wizard said. He thumped the immense book onto a handy table and opened it to a particular page displaying an elaborate illustration. "The Helmet of Justice's Balance, created by Biren the Obsessive in the reign of Oshwal the Third, some three hundred years ago. As you can see, it's a great ugly thing with silver wings sticking out like oversized ears—you'd have to be a fool to wear something like that into battle if it weren't enchanted."

His guests clustered around the table and studied the picture; the lone woman had to shoulder her way between two of her siblings to get a look.

"Enchanted how?" Buk asked.

"I couldn't say," the wizard said. "At least, not the details. The text is amazingly vague, even more so than usual, about just what spell is on the silly thing. It does say, though, that its wearer is so transformed as to pass unrecognized by his own kin, that even a man's own dog won't know him whilst he wears this headgear—I'd say that implies some sort of concealment spell, suitable for creeping up on this dragon of yours, but the nature of the transformation is never specified. And it goes on to say that the wearer cannot be harmed by flame or blade, and shall not tire before his foe, and I think the utility of *that* in confronting your dragon should be obvious." He picked up the book and slammed it shut, raising another cloud of dust.

"Is that all?" asked one of the men.

"That's all it *says*," the wizard answered. "But there's no telling whether that's the entire enchantment. These old wizards did the most astonishingly complex magic sometimes. If it does anything else, you'll just have to find out for yourselves."

You don't know what

YOUVE gOt tILL it's gONE!

The four men looked at one another, while the woman stared at the closed book

"All right, if that's the best you can do for us, where is it?" Buk asked

"Just the other end of the valley," the wizard said "There's an abandoned shrine there, a temple of the Old Reformed Cult of the Withering Light, and the legend says the helmet is somewhere in the shrine, defended by three guardians"

Three of them, four of us

"Five!" the woman snapped

"Right, five," Buk corrected himself "Three of them, five of us—we should be able to manage that, even if one of us is just a girl"

"Woman," the woman said "I'm 20 years old"

Gallopius smiled crookedly "Well, actually, I didn't say the

"Then that just leaves two," Buk said "Weapons ready, boys!" He matched his actions to his words, drawing the short sword he wore on his belt

None of the others had swords, Filmar and Sidi carried spears, Akdar had a club in one hand and a dagger in the other, and Arulla had only a knife. Together, they advanced up the crumbling marble steps

At the top Buk pushed at the door, it yielded not an inch. He threw his shoulder against it, and the ancient panels shattered, unable to catch himself he tumbled through the newly made opening and landed in a cloud of dust and splinters

He leapt quickly to his feet, sword ready, as the two spearmen rushed through the door to his aid

They found no opposition Instead Buk found himself standing

The HELMET'S wearer is SO transformed as

three guardians are individuals. The first is an enchanted hedge that grew up overnight and wrapped the entire temple in poisonous thorns

The four men looked at one another again

"The second guardian is a dozen warriors from the infamous Isle of Kurderak"

"A dozen?"

"Maybe we can sneak in," the woman suggested

"Maybe *you* can," one of the others retorted "Men don't sneak

The woman looked at him for a moment, then said, "That's stupid even for you, Filmar Men sneak when they need to"

"Never mind sneaking," Buk said "What's the third?

"The third guardian is a monster hound," Gallopius explained happily. "Supposedly summoned from some Nether Realm, with poisonous fangs and the ability to smell your very thoughts."

I don't like the sound of that"

"It's a *quest*, Filmar," Akdar said "It's not supposed to be easy!"

The wizard snorted "You may be overestimating the difficulty," he said

All five looked at him. "How?" Buk asked

"I'll let you see for yourselves," the wizard said "I'd suggest you be on about it—it's a good three miles, and it's already past noon."

Akdar laughed "Three miles! A proper quest should cross a continent or two!"

"We don't *want* a proper quest," the woman replied. "We want the dragon to stop eating our sheep and our neighbors' sheep, and the sooner the better

Then let's do as the wizard says and get on with it," Buk said, turning toward the door. "Come on."

"That'll be three ducats for the consultation," Gallopius said quickly.

"Pay him, Filmar" Buk said

Grumbling, Filmar obeyed

AN HOUR AND A HALF LATER THE PARTY OF FIVE STOOD STUDYING the former fane of the Old Reformed Cult of the Withering Light

"He did say it had been three hundred years," one of the brothers said

Vines and hedges can live that long if they're properly cared for, Sidi," the woman said

"Well, Arulla, I'd say this one wasn't properly cared for," Sidi replied

That was obvious. While dried-out woody strands of vine still clung here and there to the temple ruins, and several stumps still thrust up from the bare dirt, all still sufficiently toxic to have somewhat deterred termites, rot, or other parasites, it was clear that the first guardian, the dreaded venomous hedge, was long dead

"Why would anyone care for it?" Filmar asked "Of course it's dead!"

amid dust and scattered bones as the others hurried in

Light filtered in through the shattered door and holes rotted through the roof, and for a moment the five looked around, baffled trying to make sense of what they saw

Every vertical surface in the room, from the floor to as high as a tall man could reach, was covered with writing. It wasn't the careful work of temple artisans, but a rough scrawl, written in what appeared to be a mixture of charcoal and blood

Wonderingly, Arulla stepped to the nearest wall, where the writing was largest and clearest. "It's kind of old-fashioned," she said

"Probably three hundred years old," said Buk "Can you read it?"

Arulla nodded, and read aloud, "What sort of idiot wizard lures mercenaries and then seals them up in a temple so even he can't get in? How could anyone be stupid enough to lock us in here and not feed us? What did we do to deserve this?" She dropped down a few lines and read, "Biren is an imbecile. Biren has the brains of a hamster. Biren licks the private parts of dead weasels Biren's mother .. " She blushed, and stopped reading

"I think we get the idea," Filmar said. He looked around at the bones, noticed that several bore toothmarks, and decided not to look any longer "Two guardians down"

There's the door to the inner sanctum," Akdar said, pointing

"Right," Buk said cheerfully, clearly heartened by the condition of the first two guardians "I'll take a look." He crossed the antechamber and gave the inner door a good, hard kick

It burst open, revealing another ruined chamber. Again, there were bones on the floor—but these were not scattered and not remotely human, and a gigantic rusty chain was wrapped around them

For a moment the five siblings stood and stared silently at the bones Arulla was the first to look away, and to notice the deep gouges in the marble walls, gouges that matched the size of the skeletal claws

She shivered. "I think I'm *very* glad I wasn't here three hundred years ago," she said.

Akdar started to say something disparaging her courage, then thought better of it and admitted, "Me, too

"Where's the helmet?" Filmar demanded

"Probably back in there somewhere," Arulla said, pointing toward the space behind the red marble altar that occupied the center of the room.

Buk clambered quickly across the altar, sword ready in his hand and looked around He frowned, then turned back to face his brothers.

"I don't see…." he began. Then something caught his eye, and he looked down

"Oh," he said, "here it is." He reached down and picked up a gleaming silver helmet, very much like the illustration in Gallopius's book

"Wait!" Akdar called, as Buk lifted the thing. "Don't put it on yet!"

Buk paused. "Why *not*?" he demanded.

"Because . . . well, we don't know anything about the transformation. It might be dangerous."

"Akdar, *somebody's* got to wear this thing if we're going to get any use out of it!"

"Oh, of course! I meant it might be dangerous to the *rest* of us if we're too close."

Buk frowned. He, Filmar, and Sidi looked at one another as Arulla stared at the helmet and Akdar at his oldest brother.

"We could wait in the antechamber," Arulla suggested.

"Good idea," Akdar said. "Come on, then—let Buk try it on in private!"

"This is silly," Filmar protested. "It's just a helmet!"

Arulla looked up from the grafitti, puzzled, and met Sidi's gaze. Her brother shrugged. "I don't know what they're talking about," he said.

"Arulla?" Filmar called. "Could you come here, please?"

"Wait a minute," Sidi said, before Arulla could respond. "I think I'd like to know what's going on before you start dragging our sister into this."

"Nobody *dragged* me," Arulla replied angrily. She strode toward the inner sanctum, and Sidi hurried after her.

"All right," she demanded, "what is it that this magic helmet does that's so terrible?"

Her brothers ignored her as Filmar beckoned Sidi over. Arulla stood, hands on her hips, and listened as Filmar whispered to Sidi. ". . . shriveled right up . . ." she heard.

TO PASS UNRECOGNIZED BY HIS OWN KIN.

"It's a *magic* helmet," Akdar said. "That's the whole point, isn't it?"

"Oh, come on," Arulla said, as she headed for the ruined door. "Just do it, all right?"

"But I want to see!" Filmar insisted.

"You'll see next time," Akdar said. "If it's safe, I mean."

"Go on," Buk said.

Reluctantly, Sidi and Filmar joined their youngest two siblings in the outer chamber, and stood for a moment looking at the bloody grafitti.

Then a high-pitched scream came from the inner fane—a scream that was Buk's voice but somehow altered, and pitched higher than any sound that they had heard from Buk in the 15 years since his voice first broke.

Filmar didn't hesitate; he dashed back into the inner sanctum, his spear ready.

The other three stood ready, listening intently, but not setting foot past the broken door.

"Oh, Death and Essence!" Filmar said. "Take it off!"

The other three looked at one another, puzzled.

"I think I hear whimpering," Sidi said.

"I *know* I hear whimpering," Arulla said. "What I don't know is who's doing it, or why."

Then the whimpering stopped, and for several seconds total silence reigned.

"Should we come in?" Akdar called.

"*No!*" Buk roared, his voice cracking but otherwise back to normal.

"Should . . . should I try it?" Filmar asked, his own voice shaky.

"What is going *on* in there?" Arulla demanded.

Then Filmar screamed, a high, thin squeal of terror that ended abruptly, to be followed by the sound of metal striking stone.

"Don't break it!" Buk called. "We *need* it!"

"No, we don't!" Filmar replied. "*I'm* not wearing that thing again!"

"I'm going in there," Akdar said, suiting his actions to his words.

Sidi and Arulla looked at one another.

"I'll wait," Sidi said.

Arulla shrugged. "Me, too," she replied.

They stood waiting as the other three whispered in the inner chamber. Then Akdar said loudly, "It does *what*?"

"Try it," Filmar answered.

A moment later Akdar squeaked, "By the Ancient Powers! Get it *off*!"

Then the three were whispering and mumbling, too low for Arulla or Sidi to hear. Arulla amused herself by reading some of the grafitti on the walls, admiring the author's command of invective.

"Should we ask Sidi?" Filmar said audibly.

"Or, much as I hate to suggest it, Arulla?" Akdar said.

"I don't see much point in trying Sidi," Buk said. "It'll do the same thing to him it did to the rest of us."

"But it *can't* do it to Arulla!" Akdar insisted.

Akdar nodded. "Like turning inside out," he said. "And—" He gestured at his chest instead of finishing the sentence.

"Do you want to try it?" Buk asked, holding out the helmet.

Sidi stared at the thing, then shook his head. "No, thank you," he said. "But it can't hurt *Arulla*," Akdar said. "She's *already* a woman!"

Arulla had been just short of shouting a complaint about all the secrecy, and stopped abruptly, her mouth open.

Was *that* the mysterious transformation the helmet performed? It turned men into women? No wonder dogs wouldn't recognize their masters—men and women smelled different!

"Give me that," she said, stepping over and snatching the helmet from Buk's hand. Before her startled brothers could react she had set the thing on her head.

The transformation was very, very quick, but not instantaneous, she could feel her hips shrinking, her limbs thickening and lengthening. Her shoulders expanded, her chest enlarged and flattened, and the seams of her blouse ripped open. The drawstring of her skirt snapped as her waist added several inches—and the changes beneath that skirt were best left undescribed. Hair sprouted from her chin.

"Good heavens," she said, and her voice was deep and resonant. She looked down at herself, and felt suddenly unsteady—it was farther to the floor than it ought to be. She was four or five inches taller than she had been a moment before.

"She's almost as big as *you*, Buk!" Filmar said as he stared.

Arulla lifted her gaze and realized that Filmar was right—she could look Buk in the eye on the level, without tipping her head at all. She could look directly *over* Akdar's head.

But she felt huge and awkward and top-heavy.

This will take some getting used to," she said, "and I'll want you to teach me to use that sword, Buk—but I think I can handle the dragon."

"By the Ancients, this is horrible," Akdar said.

"This is madness," Filmar said.

Buk grimaced silently.

Sidi smiled. "It works for me," he said.

ARULLA DID NOT WEAR THE HELMET FOR THE LONG WALK HOME, NOR was still unsteady when she tried to walk in male form, as her narrower hips refused to move the way she expected them to. Instead she carried it tucked under one arm.

Filmar and Akdar both offered vigorously to carry it for her, but she declined, and asked Buk and Sidi to help enforce her decision.

She knotted the broken drawstring of her skirt, but the torn seams in her blouse weren't so simple, she stamped an old bone from the temple floor into splinters and used those as makeshift pins to hold the seams closed.

When at last they neared their village half a dozen of their neigh-

bors came out to greet them

"Well?" old Herrel called. "Did you get help?"

The brothers looked at one another, and before they could settle on a response, Arulla called, "We've hired a warrior with magical armor to deal with the dragon." She lifted the helmet. "I'm carrying this for him."

Sidi smiled. "His name's Rull," he said, before any of the others could contradict Arulla's story.

"So where is he?" Herrel demanded.

"He'll be along," Arulla said. "He said he wanted to look around a little first."

"You think he can handle the job?"

Buk looked sourly at Arulla. "I hope so," he said.

The mysterious Rull was the subject of much speculation in the village. He did eventually turn up—no one saw him arrive, but the day after the five sibs returned Buk and "Rull" were out in the fields, practicing swordplay with a pair of sticks.

The other brothers wouldn't let anyone else get close, but observers who watched from afar were not impressed with Rull's performance.

"He looks clumsy as a drunken ox," Shena said. "I don't think much of trusting *him* to kill the dragon."

"We're counting on the magic armor," Filmar said uneasily.

"And I think Rull may have a few tricks up his sleeve," Sidi added.

"I certainly hope so," Filmar muttered.

Three days after Rull's arrival, the dragon emerged from its cave for another meal.

"But I'm not ready," Arulla protested, when the reports reached her. She had been scrubbing the stewpot. "I'm still clumsy as a kitten!"

"Clumsy as a boy who's just grown a foot," said Buk, who had brought the news. "I remember what it was like, and it's probably worse for you, since it's so much faster. But the dragon's here *now*, and we can't put it off. You'll be safe enough while you wear the helmet, and you'll just have to lure the beast out."

They had tested the helmet's powers, and had found that its wearer was indeed immune to harm from flame or blade—but a good solid punch still hurt just as much as ever.

"What if it steps on me?" Arulla asked.

"Don't let it," Buk replied.

Arulla glowered at him.

"Look, we never said it wouldn't be dangerous," Buk said. "You insisted on being included anyway. Now, are you going or not?"

"I'm going," Arulla said. "Just let me change." She tossed the stewpot on the hearth, where it rang loudly and rolled wildly across the stones. Then she rose and stamped off toward her tiny bedroom.

Buk had provided her with clothing—"Rull" was almost exactly the same size and build as the eldest brother, and Buk was wealthy enough to have three complete changes of everyday attire. No one in the village had any actual armor, of course, other than the magic helmet, but Arulla assumed she wouldn't need any.

A moment later "Rull" emerged, walking with the rolling gait of a sailor—she still hadn't adjusted completely to male hips. She had the helmet on her head and Buk's sword in her hand. She picked up Filmar's spear and marched out the door of the house, headed toward the upper field.

Buk followed hastily along. Arulla turned to look at him, and Buk explained, "I'm just planning to be there in case you need any advice or encouragement. It's your fight."

Arulla grimaced, and marched on.

The two siblings spotted the dragon from a goodly distance—after all, a 60-foot dragon is fairly noticeable. They stopped to stare.

"It's big," Arulla said unhappily.

This was an understatement; the creature was gigantic, covered in gleaming green scales, with intimidating claws and teeth and even a stubby pair of horns. The one comfort in its appearance was the lack of wings—a flying dragon would have been too much.

"So are *you*," Buk said. "*And* you've got magic on your side."

Arulla nodded reluctantly, and when pushed began walking again.

They were still 50 yards away when the dragon turned to stare at them. Buk said, "I think you're on your own from here," and stopped in his tracks.

Arulla bit her lower lip and adjusted her grip on her brother's spear, then advanced farther.

The dragon watched as Arulla inched forward, spear raised. Then it spoke, in a voice like an avalanche.

"You have found your death warrior—and I my lunch."

Before Arulla could reply—or even decide whether or not she wanted to—the dragon spat a great gout of fire at her.

It washed over Arulla like so much warm mist, hardly even mussing her hair—though the wooden shaft of Filmar's spear was badly charred. Encouraged, Arulla took another step forward.

The dragon closed its mouth and stared intently at her.

"Ah," it said. "Magic. I haven't seen much of that lately."

Yes, foul worm!" Arulla bellowed, as she broke into a charge. "Magic that will spell your doom!" She closed the last few feet quickly, and rammed the spear into the dragon's belly.

The badly burned shaft shattered, and the iron spearhead bounced harmlessly from the dragon's thick, green scales.

The dragon looked down thoughtfully at the attacking warrior.

Arulla drew her sword and thrust it hard at the monster's heart.

The sword-point skidded across the green scales like a washcloth over baked-on cheese, leaving no mark.

The dragon lifted one foreleg and casually kicked Arulla aside, knocking the sword from her hand.

"Dragons have magic, too," it said. "Didn't you know? Can't keep a bellyful of fire with just your common sort of flesh and bone. I'm as armored as you are."

Arulla lay on her back on the grass for a moment, then reached up to make sure her helmet was still in place. It wouldn't do to turn back into a woman—an all-too-vulnerable woman—here. Once she was certain her gender identity was secure for the moment, she sat up.

"Whoever sold you your magic cheated you," the dragon said. "Didn't he tell you you need a magic sword to pierce a dragon's hide? Nothing less will do. We're proof against all lesser weapons, and all poison and disease, and all the other mortal ills. If not for magic swords I'd believe we'd be immortal."

Arulla decided that if she survived this she would do something terrible to Gallopius. She reached for her sword.

The dragon's forefoot snapped out and slapped down on top of

There were BONES ON THE FLOOR—but THESE

the weapon.

"Listen, warrior," the dragon said. "I am a dragon and a father of dragons, and I have come here to live, and I intend to stay many more years. Your magic protects you, for the moment—I could probably find a way around it, but I would prefer not to bother. Therefore, if you wish, you may go now, and tell the villagers that you have failed, and they might as well accustom themselves to feeding me their sheep and children."

"I'm not going anywhere," Arulla said angrily. "I'm supposed to get rid of you, and that's what I intend to do."

"Your sword isn't magic."

Arulla just glared.

The dragon signed a great puff of acrid smoke. "So what are you

going to do?" it asked

"I'm going to find a vulnerable spot," Arulla said. "Just as soon as you take your foot off my sword."

"I don't *have* a vulnerable spot," the dragon growled

"So you say."

"Fine!" The immense green claw lifted, and Arulla snatched up the sword. "Go ahead and try. Whack at me all you like. And when you give up, we'll reach an agreement."

Arulla got to her feet, hesitated for a moment, then started hacking wildly at the dragon's leg. The sword bounced harmlessly off the impenetrable scales

The monster rolled its eyes. "Great Essence, he can't use a sword any better than *that*."

Arulla ignored it and kept chopping

"You'll dull the edge," the dragon warned her. She ignored it. "You're going to ruin it!" the dragon insisted. "A good sword deserves better—show some respect!"

Arulla kept swinging wildly.

Behind her, far enough away that the dragon hadn't noticed him, Buk shook his head despairingly, then buried his face in his hands. Despite the lessons, the dragon clearly knew more about swordplay than Arulla did

Arulla didn't notice. She was determined. She had come this far, and she wasn't about to give up

She didn't need to limit herself to one spot, though, after a moment she moved her attention from the dragon's foreleg to its flank, with no greater success

She worked her way along its body, foot by foot, flailing and hacking, without leaving a mark on the gleaming scales—but she could see, after a while, that she was chipping the sword, just as the dragon had warned. She paused to catch her breath and think

"Give up?" the dragon asked, curling its long neck to look at her

"Never!" Arulla roared, startling herself with just how loud her voice was in this male body

"Listen, warrior," the dragon said, "I have sheep to eat, but I don't want you following me around indefinitely. Surely we can come to some agreement."

"Like what?" Arulla asked suspiciously

"A time limit, perhaps—if you find a vulnerable spot, or any other way to harm me, by nightfall, then I will go away never to return. If you do *not* harm me, then at nightfall *you* will go away and stop bothering me. Fair enough?"

"And if I don't agree?"

"Then I'll swat you away, stamp on your sword until it breaks, and try to find some way around that magical protection of yours."

Arulla certainly didn't want *that*. She frowned, then shrugged. "Agreed," she said. "Until nightfall." she began chopping again

The dragon sighed. "I'm going to take a little nap," it said. "Wake me when you're ready to give up."

here and there, without doing any harm

The dragon opened one eye and glared at her. "You *are* managing to be annoying," it said

"I'll find a way to be more," she said. "Sword or spear or magic, I'll find *something*."

"You'll forgive me if I don't wish you good luck," the dragon said. Then it closed the eye again

Arulla frowned. There *had* to be some way to hurt the creature! She clambered along the tail, poking at the scales here and there

She had called the dragon a worm earlier, as was traditional. But looking at it, it really wasn't one. It wasn't exactly a serpent or lizard, either. It was clearly reptilian, but its legs were jointed more like a cat's than a lizard's, and the way it curled itself up was catlike. A cat's most vulnerable spot was its belly, but she had already tried the dragon's belly without success

She studied the creature, then jumped down from the tail and walked around it. When that revealed no obvious weaknesses, she got down on her belly and tried to peer underneath. Perhaps it had curled up in an attempt to protect some vulnerable spot

She thrust the sword beneath the dragon's tail

The beast's eyes opened, and it said, "Really, now, that's rather rude, don't you think?" It uncurled, its tail sweeping her aside and knocking her to the ground, then curled up again facing the opposite direction. While it was shifting position Arulla very briefly got a good look at its underside

She didn't see any obvious weaknesses. She did see that it—or rather, *he*—was male

Inspiration struck. She got slowly to her feet

She did not start flailing away with the sword again. Instead she backed carefully away, then turned and ran to where Buk had watched the entire thing

Her brother frowned at her as she approached

"You're giving up?" he said angrily

"No," she said. "I know how to defeat it. I need your help, though."

His frown turned to puzzlement. "What?"

She explained her scheme

"I don't like it," he said when she had done

"Do you have a better idea?"

"No," he admitted

Then come on

A few moments later Buk and Arulla—not Rull, but Arula in her natural form, still wearing Buk's now-baggy tunic—marched cautiously out onto the pasture where the dragon slept. The Helmet of Justice's Balance was in Arulla's arms, the chipped and ruined sword was in Buk's hand.

Arulla climbed quickly up on the dragon's tail. She moved as delicately as she could, horribly aware that she was no longer invulnerable to the dragon's flame. Without Buk's boots on, the rough

WE'RE NOT SCATTERED, AND NOT REMOTELY HUMAN.

Arulla didn't bother to reply

The dragon lowered itself to the ground, curled its neck around until its head was alongside its belly, curled its tail up around its head, and closed its eyes. A gout of flame and smoke erupted from its nostrils as it settled peacefully

Arulla kept chopping. The helmet's spell kept her from tiring, allowing her to keep up a pace that would ordinarily have been utterly exhausting

She worked her way the full length of the dragon's body, then climbed up on the monster's tail, thinking that perhaps there was some weakness the monster thought she couldn't reach. She studied the thing's head—the stubby useless horns, the scaly ridges above the eyes, the fine, black stripes along the muzzle. She stabbed

edges of the scales hurt her feet but she ignored that as she reached over and placed the helmet securely on one of the two stubby horns

A shudder ran through the dragon as Arulla turned and jumped to the ground. She ran for shelter as the dragon stirred and raised its head

What did you do?" the monster asked uneasily. Its voice was unchanged—but after all, it was a dragon, not a human being

I found a way to harm you," Buk said

I do feel strange," the dragon admitted

"I think you'll find a portion of your anatomy has been removed," Buk said

"A portion . . ." The dragon suddenly reared up and looked down at itself. Then it let out a bloodcurdling, earth-shaking shriek

Continued on page 98

THINGS DON'T ALWAYS

... But often things work out for the best.

TURN OUT LIKE WE PLAN

By Leslie What
Illustration by Greg Carter

New Year's Eve began like any other, with Patty as the designated driver for her husband of 16 years. Roy still partied like a 20-year-old, meaning he often drank so much he threw up, but Patty drank like the 40-year-old she had become, meaning that she drank here and there, and only when she didn't feel responsible for anyone else—hardly ever. They were on their way to some friends' house for a party. They were taking Roy's car because his had a full tank of gas.

She was feeling smug about her current New Year's resolution: to give up being in charge of Roy's life. If adults didn't take care of themselves without asking others to get them out of trouble, then they weren't much different than children, just not as cute.

"Did you make your resolutions yet?" she asked Roy.

"Those are stupid," he answered. He winked. "You never lose weight," he said, not in a mean way—it hurt just the same.

"Geez, thanks," Patty said. While waterfalls rained off the car roof, a headache pooled in her head. She sneezed and saw things just outside her line of vision: dark circles, puffs of white light, wavy lines, all drifting, mirage-like, through the air. Patty had always seen things because of her headaches, just not very clearly. At times, she even experienced vague premonitions that left her feeling uneasy. Now, a vague premonition sat like the tiny pocket of air at the center of a candy jawbreaker, just waiting for someone to bite down.

Roy's car needed new wiper blades; traffic was as dense as the storm. She might as well have been drinking for all that she could see. Why couldn't they have stayed home to watch the ball drop, like in the old days? Just the two of them on their comfy couch, alternately eating finger foods and blowing noisemakers in solidarity with tightly packed revelers in Times Square, who had already blown everything in sight hours earlier, by virtue of the time difference. Except that the magic of television would

make it seem like they had wanted for Patty and Roy before starting

It was New Year's Eve and Patty wanted magic

She pulled into the Lundstroms' driveway just after nine Roy was wearing a blue silk shirt over gray linen pants Patty wore a sleeveless black dress and shiny black raincoat Her tiny handbag hung from a delicate silver chain slung across her shoulder She thought she looked chic without being pretentious

"You look like Death in that," Roy said, and then he elbowed her to let her know he was only kidding He was already tipsy from a few after work cocktails with his boss

Allergies forced rain from her eyes and nose, she pulled a tissue from her purse, which shed most of its cells in a fit of psoriatic distress before utterly disintegrating over her coat. Tissue dandruff Nice Nothing pretentious about that They stepped from the car and hurried to the porch to ring the bell

Maureen let them in and took their coats. She and Patty gave each other fake cheek kisses so as not to smudge lipstick. Roy and Maureen exchanged the real thing, but it was all in good fun, so Patty didn't mind

It didn't take long for Roy to loosen up enough to enjoy a stint as the life of the party This was *his* thing, while not laughing about it was hers Roy paraded around with a party hat strapped to the front of his pants before dropping into a lounge chair He flashed Patty a lascivious look. "Come to Papa," he said, gesturing for her to sit on his lap

She could have joined in the fun by crushing his cardboard codpiece, but not being in the mood to play the-life-of-the-party's wife, declined Instead she followed Maureen into the kitchen to help ready the champagne

Maureen teetered on a step stool to reach the crystal flutes she kept on the top shelf of her cabinet. "Dusty," she said, sounding guilty She ran her fingers along the stems

"No one can blame you for dust," Patty said

"Someone is at fault," Maureen said "If not me, then it's got to be you."

Patty faked a smile "May we all be free from dust in the coming year," she said

"Amen," said Maureen

They got to work rinsing, drying, wiping. Thank God, Maureen broke the first flute

"Bummer," Maureen said, while Patty tried to look stricken "They're from my mother-in-law," Maureen said. "Just one more reason for her to dislike me As if she needed another "

They chatted about who had the better job and whose was the worse husband, neither bothering to point out any good qualities because saying nice things wasn't what their friendship was about At quarter of midnight, the two brought out a silver tray with glasses, ice, and champagne and set it on the table Maureen passed out the noisemakers and party favors

Roy tried to put Patty in his act again. He grabbed her and breathed fumes in her face before uncoiling his noisemaker against her neck. It felt like a mummified frog tongue, not that she really knew She snatched his party favor and stuffed it inside her handbag

"Ouch," said Maureen with a bitter smile

Although he could barely walk, Roy sloshed out of the living room In search of the bathroom He didn't get far, apparently not needing to Just on the other side of the open French doors, he unzipped his Dockers and peed on the potted plant

A Ficus Patty thought She was not much of a plant person She wanted to say, "He is not always like this," except that lately, more and more, he was "Maybe we'd better leave," she said instead

Maureen muttered, "Drive safely "

Driving safely was what Patty was about. "Thank you for inviting us," she said "Happy New Year "

"Happy New Year," came the echo

On the way to the car, Roy sang some bastard hybrid of country rock and Italian opera Patty called *crockera* He sang badly and very loud. Still, it made her laugh When he wanted, it was easy for Roy to make her laugh She opened the door for him and Ray squeezed her hand

"Thanks for driving," he said.

They were about to miss New Year's for the first time in their many years together. There was no point in mentioning her aggravation as Roy would not remember in the morning. She started home

The storm, temperamental all evening, had morphed into a full-fledged tantrum Visibility wasn't an issue anymore Instead of it simply being difficult to see the road, for a moment, Patty was blinded Her head felt like a plumber was shoving a snake up her nostrils

In that moment, everything changed, like a dream that was vivid while asleep, but vague after awakening. One instant, she was cautiously driving through an intersection, the next, a drunken driver in an SUV was running a red light. Patty heard the squeal of tires and a loud crunch as the SUV slammed into her passenger side

She must have passed out for a few seconds, when she came to, she shouted, "Are you OK?" and tried to rouse Roy. The traffic signal blinked red

Roy's breathing sounded ragged, his face shone river dark with blood He mumbled Patty's name

She could not get him loose from the seatbelt

The window on Roy's side was broken and the rain streamed in Her hands and lips trembled, she called for help, several times, it seemed. There were lights everywhere, orange and red and yellow streams like an artificial sunrise

She saw the driver of the SUV step out to survey the damage to his vehicle He shouted profanities her way She didn't understand how he could blame her when it was clearly his fault His bumper was barely dented, and Roy's car looked totaled

"You shouldn't be on the road," screamed the SUV driver just as a black fetta, filled with four noisy teenagers, made a wide right turn The teen driver tried to brake, and slid—in a roundabout way that might have made a nice comic film, had the ending been less tragic—into the SUV driver

Patty saw something then, a full-fledged vision that made the circles and lines she was used to seeing look like training films The light was so brilliant she shielded her eyes Where the SUV driver had been standing, a cross appeared, and on the cross, a funeral wreath of white lilies, ribbons, and white roses—a roadside memorial that she was positive had not been there seconds before

Clearly, the SUV driver was dead She wasn't so sure about herself

Then there was a lot more screaming, some of it Patty's There were jaws of life and paramedic crews coming and going, all seemingly happening at once One ambulance left the scene with siren and lights Another left with lights but no siren The one Patty rode in was both silent and dark enough that she could hear the rain drumming against the roof. She asked, "What about Roy?"

A man she couldn't see said in an unnaturally deep voice, "He'll be OK."

Because she mistook him for the Angel of Death, she believed his answer

Ghostly wreaths were piled like lifesavers over the oxygen tanks at the back of the ambulance. A lot of people had died here, but there was no room to memorialize them one by one That made sense, in a strange sort of way

When they reached the hospital, she was wheeled on a gurney to the emergency waiting room Someone helped her climb into a chair.

"Here's your handbag," said a paramedic

"Thank you," she said, and slid the chain over her shoulder

A receptionist explained that the doctors were busy working on the others, and Patty would need to wait until someone was free to check her

A policewoman named LaVonda came by to say she was assigned to Patty's case It turned out she was assigned to everyone's cases here Because of the holiday, LaVonda was the only one on duty LaVonda was tall and artifically red haired and looked like a professional drag queen in black, chrome, and polished leather Her

clipboard seemed too routine to match the rest of her outfit

Roy might have made a joke about how clipboard technology had not changed much in the past 50 years. Patty started to laugh, only it sounded like she was crying

"It wasn't your fault," LaVonda said, writing something down. Flower petals fell away like scabs from her fingertips

It occurred to Patty that this meant she was not going to get a citation and she ought to feel happy about that. Instead, she felt numb

"You've got blood on your cheek," LaVonda said, "but I think it will wash off. Too bad," she said "Sometimes it's better when you can see the injuries. For your friends, as well as for the insurance." She was big enough to play basketball on a girl's high school team.

"Have you ever killed anyone?" Patty asked

LaVonda gave Patty a pleasant-enough smile before changing the subject

"I blame the parents as much as the kids," LaVonda was saying. "Those kids shouldn't have been driving with tires that bald. Mistakes compound mistakes and that's what usually gets us into trouble

Patty hoped that her bloody face did not show her guilt. Was it too late to replace Roy's windshield wipers so no one would know about her complicity? Or would new parts look suspicious? Look too nice for the rest of the car? What car? she thought, remembering the crumpled front end

When she gazed past LaVonda to the wall, she saw another cross and a floral wreath faded like handprints, hanging there. The room smelled wet, like a forest after rain. One of the paramedics passed by with an empty gurney. He gave LaVonda a friendly smile. "Night," he said. "Happy New Year."

"Happy New Year, Mack," she said. Neither paid attention to the carnage surrounding them, but they were professionals and Patty wasn't. Surely this explained why she saw things that they ignored.

She wondered if her brain was going to explode or if the pressure would let up first. "Could I have an aspirin?" she asked LaVonda

"Sorry," LaVonda answered. "I'm not supposed to."

A young doctor called Patty's name and patted her shoulder as he wheeled the chair into an exam room. He cleansed Patty's superficial wounds and said she could make do with butterflies. The doctor asked Patty questions about how she was feeling and Patty made up answers that she thought made her sound OK.

"How's Roy?" she asked

The doctor confirmed that though bruised and bloodied, Roy wasn't badly hurt. Broken ribs and puncture wounds that had just missed his lungs. "He's a lucky man," he said, sounding impressed

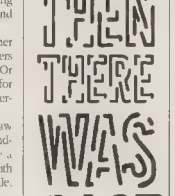
"Lucky," Patty agreed. She reminded herself that none of this was either of their faults. She felt irritated anyway

The doctor wanted Roy to stay overnight for observation, just in case. Although insurance wouldn't cover Patty's stay, the staff wouldn't kick her out if she wanted to hang out in the room to keep Roy company.

She felt faint, closed her eyes, which helped a little. Through the lids she saw another wreath and cross hanging from the opposite wall. A medicinal alcohol odor masked the faint scent of lilacs. "A lot of people die here," she observed

The doctor frowned and made up answers that made him sound OK. He wore a black cross on a silver chain. He was dressed in white, therefore he couldn't be Death. She saw now that he wasn't even a doctor, but something called a physician's assistant. Nothing here was at all like it first seemed.

She returned to the waiting room, certain that Death was waiting for her somewhere and she was destined to confront him. This premonition both frightened and excited her; after all, it was something that didn't happen every day.



Another supposed doctor came by to tell the mother of the teenage girl in the back seat that her daughter had a 50-50 chance of going blind. That mother crouched over herself and started sobbing.

The mother of the teenage boy who had been driving said, "And how is Jeremy?"

The doctor answered, "We think he's going to be just fine," and the mother said, "Thank God—I was praying." There wasn't time to realize her thoughtlessness before the first punch was thrown.

"What did God have to do with it?" screamed the mother of the injured girl, with a quick jab to the jaw.

Patty noticed a wreath, no cross, sitting like a closed book on the floor.

"I just mean—" said Jeremy's mother, unsuccessfully trying to block the punch by crossing her fists.

"What? That God saved your kid over mine? Where's the justice in that? The whole fucking thing was your kid's fault!" said the other mother. She swung her arm again.

Unfortunately, when the orderly tried to intervene, his arm deflected the second punch. It hit Patty in the nose. The woman didn't say she was sorry. The look in her eyes proved she blamed Patty as much as the boy.

Hadn't LaVonda promised none of this was her fault? She felt blood trickling from her nose.

The orderly, a young black man in his mid-20s, if that, said, "I'm so sorry."

He was cute, muscular, with smooth skin the cherry-brown color of madrone bark on his chest and arms. Patty wondered if he shaved or if that was natural.

A male nurse yelled for the cute orderly to transport someone down to the OR, breaking the enchantment. "Sorry," the cute orderly said.

Patty read his name tag—Terrance. One gold wreath shaped earring, no cross.

"It's OK, Terrance," she said. "You didn't mean to."

Lisa wasn't even supposed to be there," said the mother of the girl who might go blind. "She was babysitting, but the people came home early. Lisa found the party where her friends were. This shouldn't be happening. She doesn't even drink."

Patty closed her eyes. Her head felt squeezed, like her brains were getting a mammogram. A nurse walked over to tell her they were moving Roy upstairs and she could go with him. Patty remembered enough to gather up her jacket, and went out to meet his gurney in the hall. She stumbled over what looked like a hastily constructed memorial of plastic flowers and building blocks in the doorway. A kid. How sad. If I were Death, she thought, I would refuse to take the children and concentrate instead on people who deserved to die. The way that things were set up now just wasn't fair.

A quick scan of the emergency room showed more flower wreaths than 10-years' worth of Kentucky Derbys. Patty liked the roses better than the lilies, which—in her opinion—made too much of a statement.

Roy had 15 staples on his scalp and tape over his broken ribs. A bandage was wrapped turban-style around his head. He moaned and complained about his pain, and his nurse said in a voice that suggested she was annoyed to have to say it again, "I'm sorry, sir, but after all you've had to drink, we're afraid of giving you too many narcotics for the pain. You'll have to wait another hour before I can get you a shot."

Her nose was swelling up and pulsing with pain. Patty remembered about her headache. "I don't suppose you could get me an aspirin," she said, but the nurse didn't hear her.

"Hi," Roy said, and Patty said Hi back and went to him. He gripped her hand and tried to pull her by the arm to stand closer. Roy was the only man she had ever loved; she had the resistance of marshmallow cream, always had.

Roy started singing one of his country rock-opera songs but stopped before the chorus. "I don't feel so good," he said in the pathetic voice of a grown man about to throw up

Patty hated that she recognized that sound for what it was He heaved and she tried to break from his grasp, failed, and felt a stream of warm liquid splash her feet. *Crockeria.*

Roy grabbed her around the waist and wiped his mouth on her clothes. He groaned "Baby," he said "Baby I don't know what I'd do without you "

Her mouth was wheat germ dry. "I wonder," she asked again, "if I could get an aspirin?"

"I might have some in my purse," said the nurse She glanced at her watch "We're awfully busy, but I'll try to get back as soon as I can "

"That s OK," Patty said, not wanting to be a pest

"I can't believe you're still here," Roy said. "If it was me I couldn't stand seeing this. You're so strong," he said. "So much stronger than me."

Patty felt guilty to feel so annoyed with him

They rode up to the fifth floor and settled into 515. Roy's roommate was a little old man who was hard of hearing and demented He shouted, "Is that you, Mama? Mama, is that you?" A dry flower arrangement in an empty mayonnaise jar sat on the table beside his bed, but most of the flowers had crumbled from their stems. It was too ugly to be a memorial so Patty knew it was real just old

The nurse tucked Roy into his bed and promised to return with a clean pillow and blanket for Patty. She told Patty it was OK to drag the big chair from the old man s side over so she could put up her legs. "He won't need it," the nurse said. "He doesn't get many visitors."

There was a lovely red and white wreath hanging on the back of the door, maybe left over from Christmas Poinsettias and white heather, nothing smelly

That s what I want Patty decided Something understated but pretty

Fifteen minutes later, Terrance brought a plastic bag of chopped ice wrapped in a paper towel for Patty s swollen nose. "I am so sorry," he said. "I meant to bring you this right away We're swamped—half the staff didn't show up, because of the holiday. I'm working a double shift "

Terrance left to search for a pair of surgical scrubs He returned with something green and a black plastic bag. "I'm not supposed to do this," he said, handing her the scrubs. "Promise you'll bring them back, otherwise, I'll have to pay for them. Thirty bucks. Promise?

I promise She said, so thankful she would have given him 30 bucks as a deposit except that now she realized she had left her handbag in the waiting room She changed her clothes in the bathroom, then went out to the hall At first, she didn't remember which way was the elevator By the time she found her way back, her purse was gone

A new crew of anxious family members waited for news of some other tragedy in the waiting room No one had seen or knew anything about her handbag A flower arrangement in the shape of a rainbow hung above the doorway There was a sickening sweet smell, an overdose of Easter lilies

Patty flagged LaVonda and told her the sob story

"I expect we'll find your purse in the trash can, minus the money of course. It looks like a simple crime of opportunity, but you might want to cancel your credit cards. Just to be safe."

If Roy were here, he would have said something like, "At least it couldn't get worse than this!" She returned to his room and tried to get comfortable sitting upright, but the vinyl was morgue cold and Roy's moaning and the old man's screaming kept her awake She needed aspirin and a blanket, in no particular order She decided to go downstairs to see if the cafeteria was open and if there were vending machines that served pain relief, or maybe hot chocolate. This time, she easily found the elevator down the hall, in pretty much the same place as she had left it She rode to the basement and followed the signs and arrows.

None of this would be happening if she still had her handbag, where she now remembered she always kept aspirin in case of headaches. Oh yeah, she thought. My handbag. It occurred to her that she had no money for either pain pills or hot chocolate Crockeria.

Fortunately, Terrance was sitting alone at a table, reading He looked up and smiled and Patty smiled back

"I'm really embarrassed to ask," she said, "but can I borrow a dollar? I promise, I *will* pay you back."

He looked at her as if jokingly he didn't believe her, but fished through his pockets and brought out 50 cents

It turned out none of the vending machines sold aspirin. One did serve hot chocolate, or rather, hot water, as the directional flow or maybe the pull of gravity went awry during the part of the process where the chocolate powder was supposed to drop into the cup

Terrance said, "You'd be surprised how often that happens. Night shift sucks."

"Sometimes it seems like everything sucks May I join you?" she said

"Sure," he said, and snapped his book shut

Her brain felt tighter than sausage on a grill

"I don't suppose you have any aspirin?" she said.

"Sorry," he said. "Don't do OTC analgesics."

"What are you reading?" she asked.

"Something for school," he said.

"What are you studying?"

She was figuring doctor, but hoped whatever he decided, it was a profession where he could come to work in short sleeves She sure liked staring at his arms

"Law," he said "I'd like to be a judge."

A judge. She could picture him in a long black robe Maybe Terrance was Death, in which case she could forget about the short sleeves. She looked down and noticed flower petals sprouting from the hems of his pants. As an orderly, he must have walked around Death on a nightly basis, so it made sense

She flashed what she hoped was an innocuous smile

"Did you make your New Year's resolutions yet?" Terrance asked.

"Some," she answered

"It s still not too late to make more."

"How about you?" she asked, changing the subject.

"The usual."

They chatted until she was half-finished with her hot water. He scooted back his chair and stood.

"Short break," she said.

He shrugged "Can't take a longer one tonight God, I hate holidays "

After he walked away she sat for a while, but the stench of rotten flowers made her ill. She heard wind blowing through the vents and the echoing of footsteps that never came closer. "Hello?" she called to the empty room.

Being alone terrified her.

She thought about Roy, and how his company was better than none. She felt too old to start over. She picked up her water cup and rode the elevator upstairs. Dried blood from her fingernails flaked off to fertilize the floor. Maybe more flowers would sprout there. Something simple like daisies, something that didn't smell of funerals

LaVonda stepped on at the lobby level. "Still here?" Patty asked

And LaVonda said, "Almost done Just a couple more interviews."

"You have kids?" Patty asked

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Two Their dad's home nights How about you?

None," Patty said They had wanted kids, just not until it was too late "I don't suppose you have any aspirin?" she said and LaVonda said, "You still didn't get some' Let me see what I can do."

'Did you make your New Year's resolutions?" Patty asked

I make them every day before coming to work " LaVonda said "I wish the world would change and that people would start to give a damn

'Are you allowed to do that?' Patty asked Make resolutions for other people?

'It works about as well as ones you make for yourself " LaVonda said "And that way, when things don't turn out like you planned, you can blame the night folks

"Hmm," Patty said "I think you're right."

LaVonda waved goodbye and Patty got out at the fifth floor and headed toward Roy's room A cart blocked her path. On that cart sat a long, white, florist's box with a rectangular cellophane window, through the window was a wreath decorated with pink and white flowers She picked up the box and marveled at the complexion of the cardboard Pure white Smoother than skin Shiny and strong Patty had the idea that she was meant to deliver the box and this disturbed her She looked around and imagined that it was her duty to predict who might die next

Something sharp poked her finger a name tag with her name and an expiration date that said, "Good through January 31." So, being Death was a temp job, only without a parking pass This seemed like a good thing, as a permanent position was more responsibility than Patty wanted

Then she noticed something taped to the box that she hadn't seen before a white card with a message saying, Deliver to room 515 "

The old man, of course Bummer, Patty thought, although if someone had to die, it might as well be him He had lived a long life His passing was expected, that made it all less sad

She carried the box down the hall, and tried not to feel too conspicuous as she walked into room 515 She sat in the cold chair and placed the florist's box on the floor in front of her feet She poked at it with the point of her shoe

The old man was having a restless night Patty felt sorry for him He seemed to be suffering His breathing was uneven, he kept moaning. 'Mama is that you?" he cried After a while she could stand it no more She stepped over the box and tiptoed to his bed Gently, she stroked his cheek "There there," she said, and he asked, "Mama, is that YOU?"

It's me," she said trying to sound like someone's mother "Go to sleep, now

The old man watched her with an expression of surprise and terror, but reached up anyway to hold onto her hand "Thank you Mama," he said. His pupils were the color of packed dirt

Patty must have calmed him down some because he was quiet after that, and at some point fell asleep He was really old, but she had to admit, kind of sweet. She hoped he'd had a good life up to now, maybe even a wife who had loved him

There was a clock on the wall It was almost four Roy was just starting to look comfortable when the nurse came in to take his vital signs. She gave Roy a shot in the ass after he complained that it hurt to breathe

Patty's nose throbbed but she didn't complain. Funny how in normal circumstances, one did not ever notice one's own facial features

When the old man closed his eyes Patty slipped from his grasp. She curled up in her chair and thought about sleep

Roy began to snore

Ten minutes later, LaVonda appeared with Patty's handbag, empty except for the bottle of aspirin and the crumpled noisemaker "Just like I thought," LaVonda said "Found this in the dumpster out back Don't give up hope We might still find your wallet "

"Thanks," Patty said, so overcome at seeing the aspirin she could have kissed LaVonda "You've been great "

LaVonda nodded She looked at Patty's face and said, "Quite a schnozola! At least now you've got something to show for the accident so you can get some sympathy

Sympathy was important to someone in Patty's position Almost as good as aspirin

So, did you make your resolutions yet?" LaVonda asked "You only have until dawn so you'd better get on it Go on' What do you want?"

What do I want, Patty thought Good question She took the noisemaker from her purse but it refused to be inflated and made her head and nose ache the harder she tried Which reminded her

She managed to pop open the aspirin bottle, and poured two into her hand and 20 on the floor A few fell on top of the florist's box Roy would have said they looked like angel shit. There was more than enough water in Patty's hot chocolate cup—by now not only cool but also slightly hairy-tasting—to swallow two pills. she downed the aspirin and waited for the pain to go away

"I'm waiting," LaVonda said "What do you want?

What do I want? Patty considered She wanted Roy to stop drinking It hadn't happened so far, but that was no reason it wouldn't happen this year, especially with her wanting it

I want a nose job," Patty said

LaVonda smiled 'See you later," she said and then she was gone

Patty could almost smell the roses through the cellophane window of the box lid Her eyes began to water and her nose felt like it

was packed with rose petals

Roy turned on his back and his snoring woke up the old man, who cried out, "Mama, is that you?

She stood and nudged Roy to turn to his side so he would quiet down. Her back hurt and she had to pee and her head sizzled like a turnip in a pressure cooker. She felt like Death. She had been up all night fretting while Roy had been mainlining morphine. It wasn't fair. Some people never notice the pain they cause, while others cannot turn away from misery. Had Roy made any New Year's resolutions? If not, it was too late.

In the dim light of the room, the color of her scrubs faded to black. Even before this night in the hospital, she had long been aware of how Death surrounded her, if not the literal end of life—then the symbolic end of dreams.

This was all so unfair. She dropped into her chair and kicked at the florist's box. Her fury only made her headache worse.

"Mama, is that you?" the old man said. He really was a sweet old man, once you got to know him.

"Yes," she told him. "It's me."

There was a bottle of Tylenol #3s back in her medicine cabinet. She wanted to go home and take one or two, but had no way to get there. In a few hours it would be late enough to call Maureen, she wasn't brave enough to test their friendship this early.

"Mama, is that you?" asked the old man.

"It's OK," she said. "Go to sleep."

"Thank you, mama," he said. He sighed with deep relief.

She liked being able to calm him with so little effort. She tapped her foot against the florist's box and sat back to await dawn.

Roy laughed in sleep. "Love you baby," he said.

The endearment was so generic it could have been meant for anyone. After all these years, he owed her more than that. The pounding in her head was a combination of migraine and rage. Maybe it was time to take her job seriously. She urged the florist's box forward, so that it pointed squarely in the direction of Roy's bed.

Patty never allowed herself to feel this angry. Funny how a badge and conferring a position of authority could change a person, make them do things they had never ever thought about. She could always blame the headaches later—maybe say she had an undiagnosed concussion from the accident. For all she knew, this was true.

Roy snored, oblivious to the fact that Death was watching over him and it was his last night on the planet.

Patty brought her water to her lips. "Cheers," she said, and reached her foot for the punt.

"Cheers," the old man answered.

She tipped her cup his way and muttered "Happy New Year."

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BY ERIC T. BAKER

Never trust a vampire, always cut the cords, and make sure to master your skills.

THE WARNING LABEL ON THE BOX OF NIHILISTIC SOFTWARE'S NEW GAME *VAMPIRE THE Masquerade: Redemption* (licensed from White Wolf Game Studios and published by Activision for the PC) says "Mature." It also says "Animated Blood" and "Animated Violence." Not only is that a very accurate warning about the game's contents, it is also a pretty good review. Like the extremely popular paper-and-dice role-playing game it is based on, *VtM:R* has a more mature story than many of the other RPGs on the market, but living out that story involves lots of violence, and lots and lots of blood.

The story of *VtM:R* belongs to Christof, a medieval crusader who in 1141 AD is badly wounded and taken to a hospital in Prague to recover, where he meets a beautiful nun named Anezka. A bullying bishop shows up and the story gets started. Prague, it seems, is suffering a plague of evil in the form of an infestation of vampires. (These are new, unwelcome vampires. The old, established vampires are an integrated part of the social fabric.) Christof gets tagged by the bishop as the only hope for the city's salvation, and Christof is so good in the role that the established vampires quickly decide to bring him over to their side of the veil of death. Fortunately for the story, they don't do it so quickly that Christof doesn't have time to fall in love with Anezka.

Everway, *from Rubicon Games, lets each group of characters create its own world within the multiverse.*

The tale of Christof's search to both be reunited with Anezka and to be released from his cursed exstence as one of the undead runs through four cities: Medieval Prague, Medieval Vienna, Modern London, and Modern New York. Each city contains multiple encounters and dungeons so that along the way Christof meets (and kills) representatives from nearly all of the 14 different clans of vampires. He gains and loses allies; the player can control Christof and up to three other allied vampires at a time. He is sent on quests and errands; quests calling for him to fight his way through the various dungeons while errands simply send him from one side of the city to the other and back. He puts in appearances at court, at stores, and at nightclubs where he buys and sells lots of treasure. In the end, depending upon how much of his humanity Christof holds onto, the player is shown one of three endings.

Visually, *VtM:R* is stunning. The backgrounds are gorgeous, not to mention inventive and original. Often I found myself stepping into a new room and pausing to spin the point of view around to take it all in. Because the game is about vampires and all the action takes place at night, the look of the game is very dark. Every outdoor location is set under a black sky while indoor locations are often not as well lit as the streets.

Controlling Christof and his party is very easy. *VtM:R* is from the "Click Until You Die" school of game control. Players move the point of view around by running the mouse pointer against the sides of the screen. Objects are manipulated and enemies are attacked by clicking on them. There are hot keys, but it is the computer's mouse that gets the biggest workout to play this game.

All that said, how does the game play? Well, very early on there is a sequence that is indicative. Christof and his Brujah masters appear before the vampire Prince of Prague. The Prince agrees to grant their request, if they will bring him an object he desires. At this point Christof is given a story branch, a chance to stoically agree to the

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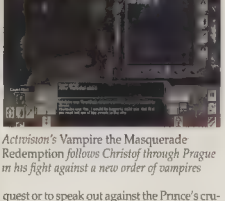

Activision's Vampire the Masquerade Redemption *follows Christof through Prague in his fight against a new order of vampires*

quest or to speak out against the Prince's cruelty. Although the game is programmed so that Christof goes on the quest, speaking out helps keep his humanity up.

The first step in the quest is an encounter with the leader of the Nosferatu clan in Prague. Not surprisingly, he agrees to let Christof's party travel his tunnels if they'll bring him an item from the other side of the city. At this point, there is no story branch. Christof doesn't get to argue or bargain, he just has to turn around and go get what the Nosferatu wants. There is nothing to fight, so it is just an errand and five minutes of continuous clicking will accomplish it. When Christof returns, the Nosferatu thanks him and opens the gate to his tunnels. Stepping through the gate puts Christof in the first level of the dungeon where he is almost immediately attacked by ... yes, Nosferatu vampires.

The designers at Nihilistic went to a lot of trouble to put all the vampire disciplines that appear in the paper-and-dice *Vampire* RPG into *VtM:R*. The computer-run characters in the game all use these abilities to good advantage, casting spells and enacting powers at every chance. Christof and his party can buy and use these powers too, becoming more diverse and flexible as they earn experience points. Thanks to the way the game's mechanics work, however, the only disciplines that Christof and his gang really need are Awe (which causes enemies to stop fighting), Feed (which allows the character to suck the enemies' blood until the character is fully recharged and the enemy is dead), and Blood Healing (which allows the character to trade blood it has drained for more health). Room after room in the dungeons that make up the game can be beaten by simply standing the character with the best Awe in the doorway and having him call, one by one, the enemy out into the corridor where the party can promptly devour them.

In addition to incorporating the disciplines, the designers also remained faithful to the extensive background of the paper-and-dice *Vampire* RPG, building interesting heroes, villains, and supporting players and then giving them all good visual looks. While game play is mostly a long march of slaughter broken up by battles with often much tougher "bosses" (and it is against the "bosses" that having a wide range of disciplines comes in handy), the tender and tragic and heart-rending moments are in the cut scenes. You spend so much time trying to keep Christof alive that you can't help but be concerned for his welfare, rooting for him either to regain his humanity or embrace his vampire destiny. Each new turning point, usually shown in a well-"filmed" short, comes as a welcome reward.

If you like the paper-and-dice *Vampire* RPG, then you will like *Vampire the Masquerade Redemption*'s faithfulness to the background and source material. On the other hand, you are likely to be frustrated by how much combat the game involves and how little interaction you really have with the computer-controlled characters. If you are coming to the world of the *Masquerade* cold, and if you like using exotic powers and weapons to unleash virtual death on hordes of the vile creatures, then you will find this game a treat.

Two boxes, each containing big Fantasy Role-Playing Games, came my way this month. One is the *Everway: Visionary Role Playing* boxed set (Rubicon Games), and the other is *Deluxe Hero Wars: Epic Role-Playing in Mythic Glorantha* (Issaries, Inc.). *Everway* is a once-orphaned system designed to let players and GMs create their own worlds and to bring brand-new players into the role-playing fold. *Hero Wars* is the first system from a new company whose owner helped found the RPG industry, and the system itself is designed to work with a background that was created 34 years ago and is still going strong.

Everway was designed several years ago by Jonathan Tweet for Wizards of the Coast. Wizards at the time was riding the collectable card game (CCG) boom, but they also wanted a role-playing game. More, they wanted an

RPG that would serve as an entry product to get all their CCG players into the RPG market. So Tweet created a game where the background was whatever you could imagine, where there were no dice used for anything, and where the outcome of everything from character creation to magic to combat was influenced by drawing cards.

When it was introduced, *Everway* was a complete market failure. Most game companies would be ecstatic to have the sales that *Everway* did, but Wizards was used to the sales figures they got back from their cards. And right about that time, TSR (and with it, *Dungeons & Dragons*) came up for sale. Wizards changed gears, selling *Everway* to Rubicon Games even as they were buying TSR.

This is a story-telling game rather than a hardcore simulation. The introductory adventure is very useful because *Everway* is so different from the other games on the market that experienced and brand-new role-players come to it on an equal footing.

The novelty of the *Everway* system begins with character creation. Each player goes through the vision deck, a collection of pictures of scenes, items, and events. The cards have questions on the back and the players use these to generate ideas. Five cards are chosen, and they are fitted into the story of the character's life. Next, players pick a name for the character, one that describes who they are. Then the fortune deck is used to choose a Virtue, Flaw, and Fate for the character and then, building on all that, the player chooses any unusual powers or talents the character will have. These can be anything from having a pet bear to being able to cast spells.

Still with me? OK, next are the Elements or

the actual character stats. For each Element (Earth, Air, Fire, and Water), a specialty is assigned to cover something that the character is good at within that field. That done, the player decides if the character is a magic user. If so, the player then creates their own system for how their character's magic will work. The rules contain a basic system and examples of types of magic are given, but players are encouraged to make up their own.

The last phase of creating a character is for the players to ask each other questions in character, which covers how they know each other, who they are, and what their past is. You can see now why the rules devote more pages to the making of characters than they do to actually detailing the system. In *Everway*, the characters are the system, each one defining a part of how the world around them is going to work.

Once the characters are created and set loose, they start interacting with the world. Whenever this interaction spawns conflict that must be resolved (combat, lock picking, pie-eating contests, whatever), *Everway* provides three methods for doing so. They are the law of Karma, the law of Drama, and the law of Fortune. For Karma, the GM assigns a difficulty to the action and the player builds a case for their character being able to reach it based on the character's powers, skills, and Elements.

Drama is similar, but lets the player out of the equation. The GM decides what would be best for the story, and that is what happens. In the case of Fortune, the GM draws a card from the fortune deck and decides what happens based on how the card relates to the situation. With the right GM, particularly one who knows the Fortune Cards and their meanings well, this is a quick and powerful system. Unfortunately, in the hands of a bad GM, it is open to lots of abuse.

The base setting for *Everway* is the multiverse, an infinite number of worlds, called

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Spheres, all connected by gates. Everway is the city at the center of it all, containing 70-some gates instead of the usual two. The books describe Everway in broad strokes, and the other spheres get only a line or two each. It is a system that asks each group to create their own world as well as their own characters.

On the complete other end of the scale is *Deluxe Hero Wars*. There is no world creation needed to play in *DHW*'s setting of Glorantha. Greg Stafford has been working on it since 1966. You may not recognize the name Glorantha or even Greg Stafford, but you probably remember *RuneQuest*. As the result of a Tarot reading, Stafford founded Chaosium, the gaming company, in 1974. Glorantha appeared in two board games and then in 1978 Stafford and Steve Perrin used it as the background for *RuneQuest*. Six years later, Chaosium sold *RuneQuest* to Avalon Hill, which stripped the game of the Glorantha background and then let it die.

Even if he no longer owned the system he'd helped invent, Stafford did not abandon Glorantha. In one form or another he has continued to publish material about the world for the past 16 years. His Web page (http://www.glorantha.com) devoted to the world is huge and updated weekly

The basic system is much more familiar than *Everway*'s, although still more "story" oriented than, say, *Dungeons & Dragons*. For instance, to create a character, the player writes a hundred-word summary of what he wants the character to be Based on that, the GM and the player then draw up the character. This is not a game where the GM will be opening the box and ready to play in an hour.

The resolution system seems more traditional at first blush. The player tries to roll under the character's skill on a 20-sided die; 1s are criticals and 20s are fumbles. If the character is rolling against another character's skill, then the lowest success wins Although this is pretty basic to most games, what sets this one apart is its mastery levels. If the character's skill goes over 20, then 20 is subtracted and the result kept as a mastered skill. The advantage of a mastered skill is that your successes are greater than those of someone without a mastered level. For example, if the character has a mastered skill of 3 and the player rolls an 11, that is a success. If the character rolls a 2, that is a critical success.

There is another layer to resolution called Action Points. These represent positional advantage, wounds, good taunts—all the things that influence a contest but are hard to model. The character starts with a number of Action Points equal to their score in the contested skill, and the player wagers a certain number of them with every contest. Either the character or the opponent loses that many, depending on who wins that round. Run out of action points, and the contest is over.

As for the background this system models, it is impossible to do justice to it in a short review, but what makes Glorantha different is that no protagonist is an island. Everyone is a member of some tribe or cult or religion. And all the characters have one form of magic or another. It is a world where the gods don't just exist, but are active participants in the day-to-day affairs of the people who worship them. Heroes try to make their own way, but they also try to relive the quests and stories of their gods, drawing power from the ordeal. It is epic, but not without a sense of humor. Afterall, the ducks are still a race that players can choose.

Deluxe Hero Wars is the best system the Glorantha background has ever had, but be warned that if you are not a fan of Glorantha or *RuneQuest*, you have a lot of catching up to do. Issaries plans a lot of supplement books. On the other hand, you may find that Glorantha is like all good, epic fantasies. The deeper you get, the more fun it is.

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the check in an envelope, stamped and addressed it.

About to step out for lunch, Mamoulian was halted by the ringing of his phone.

"Mamoulian's Rare Books."

Mister Mamoulian. One of us had to call and it seemed that someone wouldn't be you."

Mamoulian dropped into his chair. "Emily. How you doing?"

"Just fine. More to the point, how are *you* doing?"

"To level with you, not so great. I seem to have lost the thrill of the chase somehow. My job isn't what it used to be. I can't get excited about rare books anymore."

"That's too bad. What's going to happen to the Hemphill Collection now?"

"That's totally up to you. I'm out of the picture."

"You know, when you vanished so inexplicably, I have to confess that I thought you might have purloined the choicest items and bolted. But a quick glance showed me nothing was missing. That left me very puzzled. I still am. Would you like to help relieve my confusion at all?"

"Boy, Emily, I sure would. Then maybe I'd feel better too. But I can't explain what happened to me. I just fell into some kind of crazy fugue. You and your goddamn million dollar library just sent me round the bend. Now every morning when I wake up, the first thing I do is check to see if I've gone nuts during the night."

Emily remained unspeaking for a moment. "And so far?"

"So far I seem OK. But I can't risk getting close to your Hemphill Collection again. It's too full of spooks."

"Literature is powerful, Mister Mamoulian."

"Is that a quote?"

"No. But maybe it should be. Well, I guess I won't bother selling the Collection now. My heart never advocated such a sale. Only my brain kept insisting the money could do the Academy some good. But money for the gym renovations can accumulate through bake sales. The books will remain here, just where they've always been, if you'd ever care to visit them again."

"Maybe I'll take you up on that offer some day, Emily."

"I guess our association is at an end then. Goodbye, Mister Mamoulian."

"Emily."

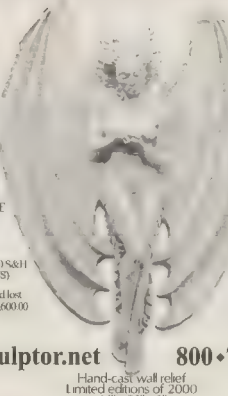
"Yes?"

"Uh, what new authors do you like these days?"

Emily's voice registered a rare vitality. "Oh, there are quite a few undiscovered wunderkinds out there. For instance, do you know the name—"

Nodding sagely, pen in hand, Mamoulian took very careful notes. ❧

•Millennium Angel•



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GOLEM

Continued from page 63

mistake was hers, going to someone who knew her name and address, but so many members of the Resistance had already been arrested that she had nowhere else to go Ironically, the golem realized, thanks to the false papers that Elsa would obtain, Radek would survive the war, although Alena would die and Hanna with her

And the golem would be free

Alena was gone for several hours. Radek slept peacefully Hanna cleaned, holding the broom in fists clenched so tight her knuckles were white Alena returned without incident and with everything she'd gone for. She woke Radek, and he quickly dressed and shaved Hanna went to let him out through the back stairs

"Margit," Alena said, once Hanna was gone "I'm sorry this took so long, I got you your papers

The golem looked down at the documents The photo was of Alena, but as Hanna had observed that first night, they were close enough to pass for each other The name was not Margit, though

Alena shook her head "If Margit hasn't been fingered as a member of the Resistance yet, she will be

The golem looked up. "So will Alena

Alena shrugged "My contingency plan is to cause them enough trouble when they come for me that they just shoot me down then and there, and spare myself torture

"Why didn't you get false papers for yourself?" the golem asked. "You could hide, too"

"Between what Radek gave me and what I had saved, I had money for two sets One of those had to go to Radek And I'm not leaving Hanna I'd rather die with her than lose her

When Alena spoke of Hanna, her face twisted oddly, almost as if she were in pain The golem studied Alena's eyes, wondering what that would be like to feel that way for another

"You know how to stay out of trouble, Alena said "You'll be able to use those papers well

The golem tucked them into her purse Hanna had errands for her—messages that needed to be delivered. The golem knew, however, that all of the recipients had already been arrested, or would by the time she made it across Prague—even if she could fly If she did complete the errands, Hanna and Alena would both be dead by the time she returned. Just as she'd been waiting for

So she took the papers and went to the Old Jewish Cemetery

Despite the crackdown, the cemetery was not empty The Jews were gradually being banned from more and more of the parks and streets of Prague, the Old Jewish Cemetery was the closest thing to a recreation area that they still had. There were

families picnicking there, among the 1,200 tombstones stacked like books on an ever crowded shelf

The tomb that the golem was looking for was near the main entrance. Paired marble tablets linked by a roof marked the grave of Rabbi Low. She sat down in the shade of the slabs and lit a cigarette.

"So I'm back," she said softly.

She heard a peal of laughter from one of the women picnicking in the cemetery.

"All I need to do is walk away," she said.

She could do that, she knew. Even if she had been bound to her creator's will, her creator would be dead within hours. She was free to choose any fate she desired. This time, finally, she would survive. Alone, but alive.

I'd rather die with her than lose her.

The golem realized suddenly that the cigarette had burned away in her hand, and she hadn't even inhaled any of the smoke. Disgusted, she stubbed out the last of it on the

another apartment. "They have a vacancy right now, the landlord isn't nosy, and he won't care who lives in the apartment aside from Alena. Don't waste time, in a week, he'll rent the place to a Nazi sympathizer who will later betray his next-door neighbor for sheltering Jews. It's much better that the landlord rent to you."

There was room in Hanna's shopping bag for her *Talmud*—it was an antique, a family heirloom. She took it, although there were

The Nazi machine turned, crushing their bodies beneath it.

"This time, nobody is going to destroy me. There won't be anyone to do it. I can live forever—I'll just avoid anyone who could hurt me. I know everything I need to know to stay alive."

She thought of the expression on Alena's face as she spoke of Hanna. *I'd rather die with her than lose her.*

"I've even got papers now," she said. "Alena bought them for me, finally." Instead of buying them for herself.

"I have freedom." She was even freer than Alena. Alena was trapped here, tied to Hanna. The golem was tied to nobody.

Again, she saw the expression on Alena's face, thinking of Hanna.

ground. Then she stood; the sun was warm on her shoulders. "This is my choice," she said to the Rabbi's grave. "This is my decision."

The golem returned to the apartment at 3:10 P.M. "Alena!" she called. "Hanna. Gather your valuables. Leave everything else, or you'll arouse suspicions. You need to go, now, or you'll both be killed in just over an hour."

The women obeyed her without hesitation. They put on several layers of clothes, though it would be hot, and each filled a purse and a shopping bag with food and the valuables they had left. The golem followed them through the apartment, talking. "Go to Kutná Hora," she said. It was one of the larger towns in Bohemia. She gave them an address for

other things that would have been more practical. She left the books of golem lore.

The golem stopped Alena at the door. "Give me your papers," she said, and handed Alena the false papers that Alena had bought for her. "Now go."

As Alena and Hanna headed down the stairs to the street, the golem felt their fate vanish from her mind. She was certain that they would live or die together, whatever happened. In the meantime—the Germans would come to arrest Alena Nebesky, and they would find her. The golem picked up Hanna's book of golem lore, lit the last of Shayna's cigarettes, and sat down in the immaculate parlor to wait. ❧

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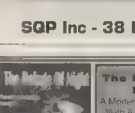

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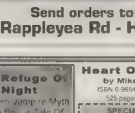

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THRUSHBEARD

Continued from page 69

me." And he looked at me piercingly with those cold blue eyes, to see if I understood

I steeled myself and met his stare

Somehow it all seemed to come together for me in that moment I knew then that I could drop my gaze to the floor and continue to hide the still-lit candle in my heart, saying something meek and subservient like "I know I have done wrong, and I am not worthy to be your wife." I could go on trying to fool him for the rest of my life, and perhaps someday the lie would become the truth

Or I could meet his gaze and show him that he had lost, that I was still unbeaten, and that with all these people here for our wedding he would have to go through with it or let all the whole world know that he had been bested by a woman If I did that then it would be war between us for the rest of my days, whether he went ahead with the wedding or not, and my hatred and misery and grief would end up devouring me, like my hawk Freedom devouring a bloody partridge's heart I did neither

I raised my head and met his fierce eyes with my own, and with my bearing I showed him who I was I was a Shrew no longer, for my girlish petulance at the limitations a princess must face and my rage at Merlin's death were passed, and I no longer needed to make myself feel better by tearing others down Nor was I the beaten-down thing he had striven to create Whether in rags or the finest robes in the land, I was a Queen

"I bear your child," I told him, and watched him collapse like an icicle in June

In his speechlessness I saw the unhappiness that had snared him in the trap of contests of power that I had so nearly escaped and I pitied him. Of course, no emotion that I could have shown him would have hurt him more, but he was beaten, and he knew it, and he knew that I knew He took my hand and led me to a room where a warm bath and my mother's wedding dress were waiting for me, and we were married a second time before my father and five hundred noble guests

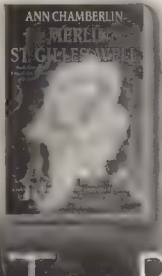
Although Clarens has never been overjoyed to be in my company after that day, we tolerate one another well enough to have produced two sons and a daughter I have tried to teach him what I have learned, and once or twice, as he plays with his sons, he eases up on trying to prove his kingship, and simply lets himself be a king I thought at first that I would forever despise him, but I really have little time for that now Running a country is an enormous task and we both know that I am better suited for it than he My days are filled with supplicants and advisers I am overseeing the dredging of the harbor. He knows that the people love me more than they love him, and that's revenge enough for me

It wasn't long before I learned from the guard who keeps the back gate that the disguises are a long-standing habit. "They help him see the true state of his country," the lad said, but I know better The true state of the female half of the country, at any rate They are welcome to him

My sons, of course, spend their days with counselors and tutors, but I am allowed to spend time with my daughter I teach her about love and power and fear, and that the only power worth having is the kind that comes from love I like to think that, if my mother had lived, she would have taught the same thing to me. Together, we are both learning how to spin thread from a spindle

Sometimes Vivienne and I go out hunting in the meadows together. I don't know much about what goes on inside that ferocious head of hers, but I know that she loves to hunt

The perch beside hers is empty, though When I unpacked my things that had been sent from my father's castle, I found the two hawks together, and I took them out and tested them in the wild Vivienne, raised by my lost love in the mews, had lost her wild instincts too long ago, but Freedom the passager still remembered. I untied her jesses and launched her from my wrist, and she circled once above my head before disappearing into the wide, wide sky. ❧



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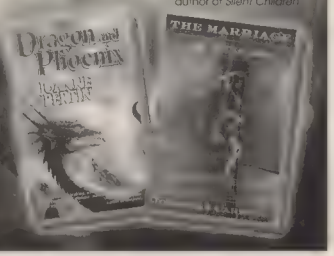

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Continued from page 20

turn the form into a clearly defined genre with its own conventions and strategies. The latest entry in this mode is Barbara Gowdy's *The White Bone*, which follows a family of African elephants—"she-ones" they call their kind—through some dark days.

The central of several focal characters, Mud is a youngster adopted by the She-S family. Given to prophetic visions, crippled and contrary, she endures life mainly thanks to her best friend, Date Bed. Having undergone her first mating with Tall Time the Link Bull ("links" are the omens elephants detect in everyday phenomena), Mud carries a fetus she is reluctant to host. Then, atop such everyday complications comes slaughter by a troop of humans, or hindleggers. Dispersed to the four corners of the Domain, the arid range they know, the elephants come to believe their only hope for continued survival is the discovery of the White Bone, an oracular instrument that will point them to the Safe Land. Severally they search, through drought and hazards galore.

Comparisons to Adams' bunny odyssey are inevitable, with both books sharing a visionary weakling, a stalwart warrior, animal myth-making and a quest for protected territory, among other things. But Gowdy's novel comes across much differently than *Watership Down*. Authentically, since elephants are in a much more precarious and harsh predicament as a species than rabbits, their life is correspondingly bleaker. *The White Bone* reads like a Greek tragedy, with very little cozy domesticity and much bloodshed. Additionally, due to the matriarchal nature of elephant society, Gowdy places less emphasis on the male heroics found in *Watership Down* and more on the intricate web of relationships that sustain the elephant culture. Think Jane Austen rather than Jack London.

Faithful to the reality of elephant behavior, clever in its speculations, brightly colored and visceral, Gowdy's book deserves to stand long in the memory of hindleggers and she-ones alike.

The Grand Tour, by Jody Lynn Nye, Baen, 467 pages, mass-market, $6.99

Authors who traffic in the exotic literature of dreaming constitute a small, exclusive club. Lewis Carroll, of course. Cabell, Lovecraft, and George MacDonald. Alan Moore and Neil Gaiman in comics. But generally the terrain of our nocturnal consciousness is regarded as too slippery and chaotic to provide the solid overarching structures that literature seems to need. It takes an unusually deft hand to shape dreams into art.

Now you can add another adept to this short list of authors. With *The Grand Tour*, Jody Lynn Nye provides a wonderfully surreal yet utterly coherent romp through Dreamland, the domain we all experience willy-nilly each

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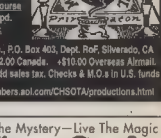

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time we close our eyes in sleep. Beautifully capturing the fluid, shifting nature of dreams, the instant transitions between scenes and shapes and emotions, Nye also blends in enough plot and continuity to avoid arbitrariness and readerly frustration.

Chuck Meadows is a directed dreamer, someone who can visit Dreamland with rather more solidity and intent than most. Dreamland is a place with fairly consistent though mutable rules and geography created by the governing Seven Sleepers, and includes such landmarks as the Meditation Gardens, the lands of Yore, Ephemer and Phantasie, the Rock of Ages, and of course the Sea of Dreams. With his spirit guide Keir and an assortment of fellow mortal seekers, Chuck journeys by train, boat, elephant, and several other modes of transport toward Enlightenment, his long-sought goal. Complicating his mystical journey is the enmity of some patriotic native Dreamlanders, led by one Morit Nightshade, a blundering villain.

The overall effect of this generally comic, yet not morally inconsequential novel is that of reading the collected works of Winsor McCay's *Little Nemo in Slumberland* (1905-1927). Hewing to G-rated, nonscatalogical themes, Nye sustains a remarkable level of invention to produce a book Roald Dahl would have been proud to write. Although the ending is somewhat abrupt, pointing toward a sequel, this small deficit is more than counterbalanced by such scenes as Chuck dealing with a trainful of monkeys that used to be his friends, as well as encountering a variety of absurd meals.

I have not yet read the first two books in this series, *Waking in Dreamland* (1998) and *School of Light* (1999), but after such an enjoyable set of oneiric exploits, I'll certainly track them down soon.

***Tales of the Dying Earth**, by Jack Vance, 741 pages, trade, £7.99*
***Time and the Gods**, by Lord Dunsany, 584 pages, trade, £6.99*

And finally, a note on a long-overdue revival. In the United Kingdom, the firm of Victor Gollancz is doing a tremendous service to Fantasy lovers everywhere by issuing one excellent classic title after another. Two recent standouts are Jack Vance's *Tales of the Dying Earth* and Lord Dunsany's *Time and the Gods*. The former bargain volume includes Vance's quartet of novels set in a world at the end of time: *The Dying Earth*, *The Eyes of the Overworld*, *Cugel's Saga*, and *Rhialto the Marvelous*. Droll, eerie, dreamlike, clear-eyed, these masterpieces have inspired writers from Gene Wolfe to Michael Shea. The latter compendium assembles six famous but hard-to-find collections of Dunsany's unique, lapidary stories into a massive Baedeker to lands on the "edges of the fields we know," including my absolute favorite, "Idle Days on the Yann." ❧

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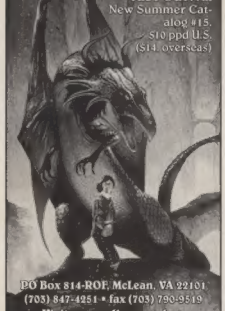
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Contributors

BRUCE GLASSCO says that "Thrushbeard" is a retelling of a lesser-known fairy tale. He is a member of SFWA. Besides publishing several stories in *Realms of Fantasy*, Bruce's story entitled "Taking Loup" recently appeared in the 1998 volume of *Year's Best Fantasy and Horror*, reprinted from the Datlow/Windling anthology of erotic horror "Sirens and Other Daemon Lovers." He has also had one story published in the modern fairy-tale anthology *Black Swan, White Raven* and a poem in *Weird Tales*.

NAOMI KRITZER's stories have appeared in *Scavenger's Newsletter* and *The Planet Relish* e-zine. Her story "Gift of the Winter King" appeared in *Realms* last year.

DAVE SMEDS is the author of the Fantasy novel *The Sorcery Within* and its sequel *The Schemes of Dragons*. He has sold short fiction to anthologies, magazines, and to Faeron Education's series of booklets for remedial reading classes. He was also the English language rewriter of "Justy," a Japanese "manga" SF miniseries. He holds a third-degree black belt in Goju-ryu karate and teaches classes in that art.

LESLIE WHAT will have new stories appearing soon in *Asimov's*, *The MacGuffin*, and *Bending the Landscape: Volume Three*. Leslie is a retired licensed vocational nurse who began writing in earnest in 1992.

PAUL DI FILIPPO is a native Rhode Islander, born in 1954 and partnered with the wonderful Deborah Newton since 1976. Paul sold a story to *Unearth* magazine in 1977, but only began selling to any large degree in 1985, with near-simultaneous stories in *F&SF* and *Twilight Zone*. Since then he has placed over 100 fictional pieces and numerous nonfiction essays and reviews. Mike Lawson and Paul form the writer known as Philip Lawson, whose second mystery, *Muskrat Courage*, appeared last spring from St. Martin's.

JOHN MONTELEONE has been a diverse and successful illustrator for the past ten years. He has created realistic paintings for such clients as Time Warner, 20th Century Fox, and *Reader's Digest*. John's work was often featured on the covers of *Science Fiction Age*. He has been a professional kick boxer and is certified in Bruce Lee's Jeet June Do Kickboxing. He is also currently teaching Science Fiction Illustration at the School of Visual Arts in NYC.

WEB BRYANT's artistic skills cross many disciplines in commercial art. He was part of the design team that created USA Today. Other achievements include art directing the first national children's newspaper, *Pennywhistle Press*, and creating national award-winning maps and graphics. His first love is painting, especially when he can work with the wonders of natural and directional light.

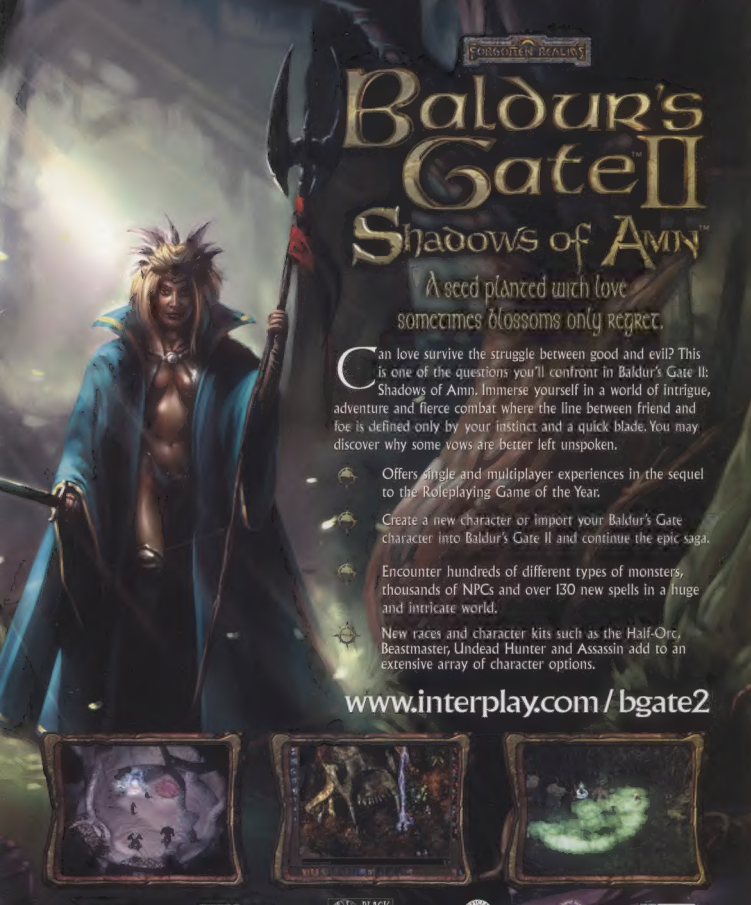
JOEL NAPRSTEK has taught at the School of Visual Arts, and he is currently teaching at the Joe Kubert School. He has worked in automotive art, mural painting, and graphic art for *Malibu Comics*. He has recently completed a graphic novel based on the Flying Tigers for Kitchen Sink.

LAWRENCE WAITT-EVANS is the author of some 30 novels and over 100 short stories, most recently "Dragon Weather," which *Science Fiction Chronicle* named the best Fantasy novel of 1999. He is probably best known for the Ethshar series, which will continue soon with "Night of Madness," and for the Hugo-winning short story "Why I Left Harry's All-Night Hamburgers."

RESA NELSON attended graduate school at the University of Massachusetts in Amherst, earning a Master's in sport management. She is currently a technical writer of Oracle Computer Corp. in Boston. Resa is a graduate of the 1985 Clairon Science Fiction Writer's Wrokshop. She has sold stories to *Science Fiction Age*, *Aboriginal*, and *Pulphouse*. She has written two novels she is trying to sell.

BROECK STEADMAN is just back from Key Largo where he and his wife and kids worked on a mural of a coral reef. This was at Island Dolphin Care where people can swim with the dolphins. The mural is working in conjunction with a touch tank that will bring the coral reef to the people. Broeck and his family painted an underwater environment and filled it with things that will be in the tank. Broeck's paintings are featured on the October *Games* magazine cover, and another painting was also on the February *Valentine's Day* cover. He says this cover was the most complicated painting he had ever done. It involved a scene from *Alice in Wonderland* where the "Hearts" had lost all their hearts, 87 which are hidden in the painting. Why 87? Well if you fan out a deck of cards and count how many hearts there are—the answer is 87. This piece is also a jig-saw puzzle from "The Great American Puzzle Factory," available now. To check out Broeck's artwork go to his Web site at http://www.monmouth.com/~artofficial.

TERRI WINLDING was raised in New Jersey and Pennsylvania, left home at 15 and spent the rest of her teenage years wandering through Mexico, Ohio, Boston, London, and Dublin. In the 1980s she worked as a Senior Editor in the New York publishing industry. She is best known for her two decades of editorial work in the field of Fantasy literature. Terri has published over 25 books and exhibited her artwork in galleries and museums across the U.S. and abroad. She has won five World Fantasy Awards and the 1997 Mythopoeic Award for Best Novel of the Year.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